

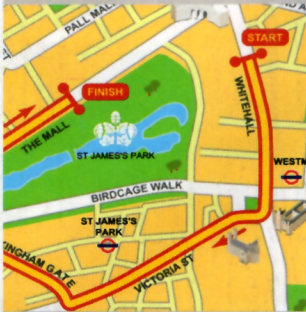
CBW

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with the news
every
Wednesday

THIS WEEK



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The Skills Shortage

You know that point when policemen all seem very young and you automatically tune to Radio 4 and not Radio 1? I seem to have hit it. Or I certainly have when it comes to education.

At what point did normal, decent jobs become unattractive? Jobs like driving buses and coaches, for example. It's no secret that there is a dearth of drivers. Every operator I talk to mentions it. The same is true of mechanics and skilled engineering staff.

Surely there's a flaw in the current approach to further education in particular. If we create a system whereby everyone feels that they have a right to a university education, no matter how spurious the course is, then we run a huge risk that we marginalise decent, necessary jobs that the country will need for many years to come. Sure, if we want we can outsource all our manufacturing to some nation that employs child labour, we can move all our call centres offshore (preferably into the sea as far as I'm concerned, but that's another issue!) and we can give out Masters' degrees in wine bar management if we want to. And yet how do you outsource plumbing or diesel engine fitters, or coach driving?

For the record, I have no issue with companies employing drivers from overseas. I think it's a shame they have to, but I applaud their ingenuity in at least ensuring the jobs are being done. But surely the time is coming for the country to wake up to the vast skills shortages that exist. And, more importantly, to work on re-empowering many traditional jobs.

I don't know if this is politically incorrect or not, and I don't care, but let's face it – there are many different levels of intellectual ability. And since when has intellect been the be all and end all? A society needs all sorts. We need people who are good with their hands, people who are skilled at manual labour, people with cool nerves, artists, intellectuals, drivers, plumbers and policemen.

If we create a whole generation of people with letters after their names, and only celebrate educational longevity, then we are creating a society that will be increasingly unable to function. No matter what technology is down the road, we will still need people to drive our buses and repair their engines for many, many years to come. We need to remember that those jobs are every bit as important to society as they ever were... perhaps in the light of climate concerns more important than ever?



Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

Coach and Bus Week is a supporter of the following organisations:



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LEZ – time for a re-think?

Zone based on particulates may have to let older vehicles enter

The proposed London Low Emission Zone (LEZ) – out for consultation until the end of January – has thrown up some serious concerns which are likely to cause Mayor Ken Livingstone and Transport for London to re-think their strategy.

According to the proposals, any bus or coach entering London after the 2008 implementation date, with emissions certified below Euro 3 levels, will be liable for a £200 per day charge. This ruling will not affect coaches visiting from abroad – although a close watch will be kept on any foreign-registered vehicles deemed to be inside the zone for more than just dropping or picking up passengers.

The Bus and Coach committee of the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders says although the industry recommended an age limit be imposed on vehicles allowed into the zone, this was rejected in favour of upholding Euro emissions standards and settled on Euro 3 as the minimum requirement.

However, it has emerged the criterion set for compliance has been based on particulate emissions – which raises some important points. There are some vehicles dating back to the early 1990s capable of meeting the particulate emissions levels required by the LEZ – providing the engines are in good mechanical condition. Although they could pass the same particulate tests as a Euro 3, their NOx emissions are way above – yet this has not been considered and appears to a loophole that would continue to allow many older vehicles to operate legally within the zone.

Potentially this could see a dramatic build-up of NOx levels and deterioration of air quality levels.

Tests have shown some Euro 2 vehicles equipped with additional exhaust filtration can be made to meet the required emission levels on particulates, but there are issues over bringing NOx emissions down as the stop-start nature of operating in urban conditions fails to generate sufficient heat in the exhaust catalysts for them to function efficiently. Some considerable experimentation with fuel-borne catalysts to aid sufficient temperature increases have only been partially successful in



What's the future for London's Low Emission Zone?

solving this problem.

Another awkward situation highlighted by the SMMT concerns non-compliant vehicles forced to enter the LEZ for repairs, maintenance or testing at facilities or VOSA testing stations sited inside the M25 boundary. These vehicles will be charged the £200 fee.

It means any commercial vehicle suffering a breakdown on or close to the M25, which is recovered to a site within the LEZ, will attract the penalty. The SMMT believes as things stand, any vehicle being towed into the zone will not be liable, but when it is repaired and driven out again it will be charged.

Operators with depots within the M25 boundary also face problems involving their fleet age profile because any non-compliant vehicles will be charged the daily rate even if they are operated entirely outside the LEZ.

CPT appoints director of coaching

The CPT has appointed Stephen Barber – ex-operations director at Wallace Arnold – as its new director of coaching.

Much speculation has surrounded the newly created position. Incoming director general Simon Posner announced the high-level job when he took over on January 1 as part of his promise to deliver more for coach operators.

Mr Barber has 38 years experience in the coaching industry, almost all of it with holiday giant Wallace Arnold. He says he understands what is expected of the job. "Wallace



Stephen Barber

Arnold was a member of CPT so I have had a close working relationship with them for many years. I was chairman of CPT's Coach Commission and also sat on many working parties set up to address specific industry concerns. I therefore have professional knowledge of what the industry concerns are and what it needs and expects from its trade association."

Mr Barber says he has identified

two immediate priorities for his job: "I aim to build on the strong foundation CPT has already created to ensure that the coach operators' interests are strongly represented to legislators and regulators at all levels, and secondly to demonstrate to members and to potential members the very real benefits of membership of CPT."

He stressed that as soon as possible he would be holding discussions with CPT coach members. "There is no better way to achieve successful outcomes than personal contact and face to face discussions," he said.

Simon Posner says: "We are delighted to have got our man. Stephen's experience gives an even greater emphasis to coaching issues within CPT and I am confident that this will give our members an even better and more focused service."

ROSPA awards closing soon

The closing date for entries to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' 2007 Occupational Health and Safety Awards is on February 19.

Last year – the 50th for the awards – saw 1,300 winners announced, all entitled to display the logo on their company literature. Entries are welcome from every type of workplace. Firms can win a gold, silver or bronze award.

Presentations to winners will be made at ceremonies alongside the Safety and Health Expo exhibition and RoSPA's Occupational Health and Safety Conference at the National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham, on May 22-24, 2007. For more info see www.rospa.com/awards.



This Stagecoach in Cambridge decker – literally blown off the road – was one of very few road-based public transport casualties of last week's freak storms. Meanwhile, many other forms of mass transit – trains, planes and boats – came grinding to a halt, with buses and coaches left to pick up the pieces. Fraser Eagle MD Kevin Dean paid tribute to his company's staff and suppliers who were called at very short notice to keep the country moving: 'All of our staff and suppliers worked extremely hard in difficult and demanding circumstances and should all feel proud of what they achieved,' he says. 'Large parts of the rail network came to a complete standstill and we were inundated with requests from our clients for emergency vehicles.'

UK North and GM Buses out for the count

Manchester independents UK North and GM Buses, went to the wall last week, after their bankers Lloyds-TSB appointed accountants Croll as receivers, as the company neared the end of its fourth week of suspension. It is understood that after the initial suspension order had been made on December 22, the companies had been in daily contact with its bankers, whose patience finally ran out when the last appeal for a lifting of the suspension was turned down on January 12.

Mark McGhee, solicitor for the two companies, explained to the reconvened public inquiry last Friday, that the previous day director Vincenzo Casale had been called by accountants Croll, who had been appointed as administrators. "UK North had an initial overdraft facility, and a group facility covering GM Buses, but in view of this, the company is no longer able to satisfy its financial requirements."

The third day of the public inquiry was expected to be dominated by a further report from VOSA traffic examiners who had asked for more time

to study duty schedules submitted by the bus companies, which showed that all drivers were getting their required 24 hours off duty every fortnight (CBW January 17). The examiners had been given 28 days to complete their inquiries, and tabled a report just before the reconvened inquiry started, but this was not discussed in public, and the examiners were given more time to complete their findings.

The suspension had starved the company of vital income with which to pay their employees and make their lease payments, and even a concessionary fares payment from GMPTE covering the period from April 1 last year was withheld. Local news sources reported on Friday that over 70 Polish drivers from UK North had applied for jobs with First Manchester, and 40 had been taken on.

In delivering her verdict at the public inquiry Beverley Bell, North Western traffic commissioner said that putting to one side her findings as to repute and professional competence, she would revoke the two companies' licences on grounds of financial standing, but she allowed 28 days grace, in case any other parties wished to take over the licences and apply for a lifting of the suspension orders. Full report on pages 18-19.

All operator licensing now in Leeds

VOSA has announced that the transfer of operator licensing application processing from the South Eastern & Metropolitan, West Midlands, Welsh and Eastern traffic areas to the central licensing unit took place last week.

The address for the processing of operator licensing for all traffic areas is now – VOSA Licensing Application Services, Hillcrest

House, 386 Harehills Lane, Leeds, LS9 6NF.

Operators are being informed individually of the change of address and telephone numbers. Decisions on licences in the South Eastern & Metropolitan, West Midlands, Welsh and Eastern traffic areas will continue to be made in local offices.

Post for the public inquiry

Veolia denies 'no coach tours' rumour

Veolia Transport has denied that it is planning to cease running coach tours in its South Wales operations.

Word had reached CBW that the company was planning to cease its coach tour operations and concentrate on its core business of local stage carriage and contract bus work.

However, Veolia's Nicky Vincent told CBW: "It's totally untrue. We have no wish to stop that area of the business. A review is currently under way. We intend to continue as normal and will hopefully look to grow the business."

Briefly

The funeral of Mr Geoffrey Clarkson, the former chairman of Crusader Holidays, will take place at 1100 hrs on Saturday January 27, 2007 at Lawford Church, Lawford, North Essex.

Campaigners fighting to have wardens on school buses in Leicestershire to fight ever increasing vandalism have won their battle. The county council is paying £40,000 to put trained supervisors on the bus routes suffered the most damage. In addition CCTV cameras will be provided on 20 extra buses at a cost of £50,000. More next week.

The East London Coaches private hire and excursion unit of the former Stagecoach London bus business will close 'in the very near future', new owners Macquarie announced this week. The operation employs five Plaxton-bodied Volvo B10Ms run from the company's Waterden Road base in Stratford. No further trips will run after March 31.

The government has announced tougher penalties for drivers using mobile phones. From February 27, the fixed penalty will include three points and a doubling of the fine to £60.

The Conservative Party will put forward proposals to eradicate traffic signs and signals in a 'Green Paper' on roads this year. Research in Holland shows it makes drivers more cautious and cuts accidents. The Labour Party has also considered the idea.

Charles Clarke, MP for Norwich South, on Norfolk County Council's decision to axe its Orbital bus service: 'I deplore the county's recent decision not to give the orbital bus in Norwich the full three-year experimental period. The marketing of the service has been execrable and very many of my constituents who live near the route still do not know when and where the bus goes. It needs time and good marketing to succeed.'

Wilts & Dorset aims to build on 9% growth

Pamphlet aims to attract more passengers to services

Wilts & Dorset is distributing a 12-page pamphlet to 180,000 homes within its operating area to broadcast the news that it carried 9.25% more passengers in 2006 and to encourage more new users to its services. The publication highlights the £11m investment made in the business since Go Ahead bought the company in 2003.

The pamphlet is targeted at those who have not yet tried Wilts & Dorset's new buses and services introduced over the last few years.

"This percentage proves a considerable turnaround over the last 12 months and is high compared to the increases generally experienced across the UK," said Wilts & Dorset managing director Alex Carter. "Previously Wilts & Dorset was experiencing a year on year decline in passenger numbers."

However, despite the growth, Carter admits that Wilts & Dorset will continue to be criticised by a minority of the population, or 1% of the company's total customer base, that were adversely affected by the service revisions in Poole last summer, the first major update of the network in almost 30 years. "We accept that a small number of the changes we made in Poole were not popular but it was vital to restructure the network to help increase reliability, punctuality and frequency of our services with the limited resources we have," he maintained. "Our role in society as public transport operators is to provide services that offer to as many people as



Passenger growth at Wilts & Dorset

possible a viable alternative to using the car - not to run empty buses which then have to be funded by tax payers. The growth in passenger numbers proves that we are placing bus services where sufficient people need and like to use them."

He added that he was confident that more people can be attracted to services: "This pamphlet, and other initiatives we have planned, will help to put the idea of hopping on a bus, to more people who do not wish to drive everywhere, every time. We can play an important role in the reduction of traffic congestion and pollution. There are information details provided so that timetables can be accessed and travel advice will be offered."

Arriva buys into German bus and rail group

Arriva has further expanded its presence in Europe with the joint acquisition of a controlling stake in German bus and rail operator Ostthannoversche Eisenbahnen AG (OHE).

The Sunderland-based group has joined forces with German regional transport operator Verkehrsbetriebe Bachstein to purchase 86% of the business after the German federal government, the Lower Saxony regional government and Deutsche Bahn decided to sell their shares in the company, which owns the remaining 14% of shares itself. The deal is worth £20.5m, and is expected to be finalised next month.

"This acquisition will be a welcome addition to our increasing European operations and further strengthens our position in the German transport market," said Arriva chief executive David Martin. "OHE is a diverse business and as a leading European transport group we can use our wide experience to help the business develop whilst also learning from our experienced consortium partners and the local management team."

OHE runs 400 buses in Hanover, Braunschweig, Bremen and Hamburg, and is a shareholder in regional rail operator Metronom. It broke even during 2005 on a turnover of £89m.

O'Neill steps in to replace Moffatt

Northern Ireland's state-owned bus and rail group Translink has named an acting chief executive following the shock departure of previous postholder Keith Moffatt from the company at the turn of the year. With effect from last week, Translink's general manager - bus, Philip O'Neill, became acting chief executive.

The appointment comes as Translink's parent body, the Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, reviews the management structure of the business. It is understood that Moffatt left his post after becoming frustrated with his relationship with his public sector bosses.

However, O'Neill last week said that he was looking forward to working with Translink's stakeholders "to maintain our track record of success."

Merron visits York amid anger at higher fares

Transport minister Gillian Merron walked into a row over higher bus fares in York when she visited the city last week, and promised councilors that the forthcoming changes to legislation will give more powers over bus networks and fares levels to authorities such as City of York Council.

From this week, First increased single fares by 10-20p, returns by 30p, and added 50p to the cost of a FirstDay travel ticket, taking it up to £3.50. York's Labour leader Councillor Dave Merrett, who met Merron during her visit, took the opportunity to raise the question of rising bus fares with her.

"The last couple of years of fares increases have been excessive and unreasonable," he told the minister. "It took far too long for First to bring in the full range of discounted tickets on their services. There is still no ten [journey] child ticket card or discounted family tickets as promised. This is hitting families the worst, and stopping

children using the buses on the way to school as they and their parents cannot easily afford them.

"First are discouraging the younger generation from using buses when they should be their future bread and butter."

Merron responded by promising Merrett that legislation proposed in the Putting Passengers First paper will give more powers to local authorities - it will be the 'biggest shake up for two decades' she promised. "This bus policy will give local authorities the ability to ensure punctuality, frequency and fair fares," she added.

First York points out that the increase is the first for over a year, and is necessary to offset a 7% increase in costs over the past 12 months. "We have managed to hold our prices for more than a year but we have now reached the point where some fares have had to rise," said commercial director Peter Edwards.



125 years of publicly-owned transport in Blackburn ended on Sunday, with the completion of the transfer of the former council owned undertaking to Transdev. The Blackburn Transport name will remain for now, but the legal lettering was changed throughout the day to Lancashire United and its Harrogate address. Former Blackburn transport managing director Michael Morton becomes divisional director under the new set up, and there are no changes to routes at present, although Transdev has already ordered 25 new buses for the town, worth £3.8m, for delivery in April. The photo shows the last Blackburn bus returning to Intack depot after completing its duties.

Stagecoach buys Ensign's Cambridge operation

Stagecoach's Cambridgeshire bus business has acquired the staff and vehicles run by Ensignbus under the Cambridge Blue banner. Cambridge Blue ran the City Sightseeing open top bus operation in Cambridge as well as a city centre shuttle service to the rail station.

The deal, for an undisclosed amount, sees 21 staff and the lease on Cambridge Blue's operating base near Ely transfer to Stagecoach from the Essex-based bus dealer and operator. No vehicles have changed hands, and Stagecoach is converting some double deck buses to operate the sightseeing tour.

South Gloucestershire celebrates Bristol wins

South Gloucestershire Bus & Coach Company has expanded in Bristol with the award of four local bus contracts in the city from Bristol City Council. The authority has had to go out to tender on the services, which link Kingswood,

Clifton, Southmead, Westbury on Trym and Hotwells with the city centre after previous operator Eurotaxi withdrew.

The services currently carry 150,000 passengers a year, but the city council expects improved

quality and reliability to lead to an increase in patronage of up to 50%.

At the same time, the contracts for evening and Sunday journeys on four routes in the city also formerly run by Eurotaxi have been awarded to First.

Hybrid StreetCar 'a real possibility'

A diesel-electric hybrid version of Wrightbus's StreetCar articulated vehicle could be set for the UK.

Wrightbus is shortly to complete First's initial order for 39 StreetCars for its ftr services, although it has an exclusive option on the first 100 to be built for the UK. Once this order is complete in the spring, it will build the Las Vegas StreetCar RTVs, which will be fitted with a diesel hybrid drive system based on a Cummins ISL engine. Wrightbus group managing director Mark Nodder says that the Las Vegas order has generated "significant interest" from UK operators making the development of a hybrid StreetCar for the UK market "a very real possibility".

"Our work to date with hybrid technology in London, together with the project for Las Vegas, give us an ideal springboard for further development of StreetCar in Europe," he said. "First are one of a number of operators who see real possibilities for a hybrid version of StreetCar and our partnership on the ftr project means that they will naturally get the first opportunity to evaluate such a development."

Nodder also confirmed that work was progressing on a conventional diesel-powered StreetCar at Euro 4 and 5 emission levels.

Briefly

The no-go zone for jobs at Hammersmith Bus Station – London's second busiest transport interchange – is being extended after proving successful in clearing out brawling youths.

More than 1,000 emergency hammers have been stolen from Travel West Midlands buses in the last year. Vandals have been smashing glass panels to grab the hammers, worth £20 each. Phil Bateman, corporate affairs director for TWM, said the firm was working closely with police to try and stamp out the problem.

Householders face council tax rises of up to 7.8 per cent in April according to *The Times*, partly because of higher than expected costs of free bus passes for the over-60s. Gordon Brown allocated £350 million last year when he extended his scheme of 50% subsidised bus fares to free passes for the over-60s limited to local trips. The LGA said many districts had found that more people were taking up the scheme than expected.

The London Borough of Bromley – the lead borough for the London Bus Priority Network – has tendered a contract to introduce additional bus priority and associated traffic measures across all 33 London boroughs. Due to run for between 5-10 years, the deadline is February 10, with the winner announced at the end of the month.



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Reinstate 12 day derogation says IRU

New rules will cut jobs, vehicles and market share

The International Road Transport Union is calling for the 12-day derogation rule to be reinstated, saying it could cost the industry 30% of its market share.

The 12 day rule allows drivers to work for 12 consecutive days before taking a weekly rest period. When the new EU Regulation on Driving and Rest Time Rules (561/2006/EC) come into force on April 11, 2007, this will no longer be allowed. Instead, drivers will be able to work a maximum of six consecutive days, meaning typical seven day tours will need a 'coach free' day, or need an extra driver for the trip where one would have been sufficient previously.

After a survey of its pan-European members, the IRU says that a loss of the derogation will have 'catastrophic consequence for one of operators' most economically productive activities'.

It says costs will increase by between 8 and 15%, or by between €400-800 per trip. The new rules will also hit smaller companies the hardest: across Europe 50% of the companies involved in coach tourism have between 2-10 vehicles, and rely on the sector for 40% of their turnover.

An IRU spokeswoman says: "The re-instatement of the 12-day derogation is an urgent requirement for the coach sector. On economic, road safety

and social grounds the loss of this derogation lacks justification. The IRU will do its utmost to convince decision makers that in this instance where exceptional damage will be caused to the coach and tourist industry, the re-instatement of the 12-day derogation is the right political and social answer, including within the framework of the recently re-launched 'Better Regulation' initiative of the European Commission."

Respondents were concerned that this loss of flexibility and increase in cost will impact coach tourism's market share, with estimates ranging from 10-30%. Figures from Belgium suggest that the knock-on effect of this will be up to 6% of drivers made redundant, and the coach parc shrinking by over 4%.

The IRU also says re-organising tours to co-ordinate driving time with itineraries becomes more complex and a further drain on company resources, and makes building in a margin of protection for unforeseen circumstances much harder.

It says the impact of the changes will be felt most for non-EU passengers who are more likely to take tours over six days. The IRU is also concerned about the welfare of drivers who will now, for instance, be taking rest days in resort as opposed to at home.

KCBOG gaining ground?

The Kent Coach and Bus Operators Group says it may be gaining ground in its battle with Kent County Council over the operation of its in-house Passenger Services company.

It says the recent closure of the council's Tonbridge Depot is a sign that its campaign is having some results.

The group was set up in 2005 largely in response to a revised Home to School contract, but the role and financial viability of KCC's own bus and coach operation was always high on the agenda.

A re-drafted contract, more acceptable to operator's insurance companies as it rewords the catch-all liability



One of KCC's self-operated vehicles that so angered Kent operators

clause, should be issued soon. The Group has had discussions with KCC on its Kent 2010 proposals for concessionary travel for school children, and has given evidence to the School Transport Committee.

The group has also published its constitution and set membership fees levels.

Large operators (over 50

vehicles) will pay £200 per year (£100 for CPT members), and small operators £100 (£50 for small operators).

The next meeting, featuring presentations from the DVLA and Siemens VDO on digitachs, will be held at the Stagecoach Depot, Cobbs Wood Industrial Estate, Ashford, at 19:30 on February 1.



One of Lucketts' new 70 seater Plaxtons

Lucketts sparks school travel revolution

Lucketts Travel has established a new home to school brand – Solent Student Link – and says the new development has revolutionized school travel services in Portsmouth.

The company has taken over a significant part of the operations of the failed operator Hellyers – including its travel shop as well as five school contracts – and says that amalgamating the latter with its own operations has made for a much more efficient service to pupils and parents.

Solent Student Link kicked off at the start of the January term and is a series of daily colour-coded routes open to pupils in Portsmouth in term time.

"Taking over all these routes has enabled us to take an overview of the network and provide the right capacity vehicles to cover the demand from each area," says Ian Lockett.

The service has capacity for 530 pupils and is designed to be convenient for parents and guardians, offering a choice of over 70 stops.

"We have a number of different options for parents to purchase fares, either return or single journeys for the entire term or one off day passes," says Mr Lockett.

Lucketts Travel has recently invested in three new 70 seater Plaxton Profiles on Volvo B7R chassis specifically for school use, which takes it fleet of dedicated school vehicles up to eight. Each dedicated coach has been painted a vibrant yellow to ensure excellent visibility.

Lucketts took over and re-branded Hellyers' Travel Shop at Gosport Bus Station just before Christmas, rebranding the exterior.

In addition to three staff at the shop, Lucketts also took on some former Hellyers' drivers and office staff.

Following negotiations with administrators, Lucketts also honoured the remaining trips sold by Hellyers.



Driver slams Cantabrica

An ex-Cantabrica Coaches driver says he was sacked because he refused to break driver's hours rules on orders from the management, although this is denied by the company.

Talking to the *Watford Observer* newspaper last week, Geoff Snowdon, 50, says he was awarded £3,600 in October 2006 after an employment tribunal found he had been unfairly dismissed.

Mr Snowdon says he was sacked as the result of an incident in France in February 2005. He says the coach arrived late to the resort and that he was ordered to drive back to the UK after only five-and-a-half hours rest.

"I refused to drive back until I had my safe, legal rest," says Mr Snowdon. "I was then the

victim of bad language from a senior member of staff. I was told the coach was leaving with or without me."

Cantabrica finally terminated his contract in October 2005 citing, according to Mr Snowdon, the incident in France as the primary reason.

Mr Snowdon says he is still waiting for his money because the company that employed him – Cantabrica Coach Holdings – was wound-up by the time of the tribunal.

David Stewart, managing director of the Cantabrica group companies says that the company 'could not be bothered' to defend Mr Snowdon's action. He told *CBW* that he had sacked Mr Snowdon after he stormed out of an anger management session.



Premium Tours – the London-based operator who specialises in sightseeing tours for overseas visitors – has decided to start operating its own vehicles rather than hiring in from other operators. The company has started its fleet with four brand new 53-seat Jonckheere-bodied Volvo B12Bs. Premium Tours' managing director Neil Wootton says: "Our tour work was being handled by some very good quality coach operators but we felt the time had come to invest in our own fleet, which would also give us control of the quality and reliability of the vehicles and drivers." The vehicles all feature the 420bhp engine with I-Shift, full climate control, TV/DVD and PA system and fridges, with toilets to be fitted later this year.

No finance audit for Coach Marque

The CPT has rejected a call for a financial audit to be included in its Coach Marque scheme, saying it was never designed to be an indication of an operator's financial standing.

CBW reported last week that Ken Robins, managing director of Coach Marque operator Excelsior Coaches in Bournemouth, had called on the CPT to include a financial audit. He says the failure of a Coach Marque member would reflect badly on the standing of the scheme, which does audit staff, systems and vehicles.

CPT's head of media David Watson tells *CBW*: "It is generally accepted that financial scrutiny has no part to play. Coach Marque is a marketing device, a brand mark, recognising operations that meet set standards of vehicle facilities, standards of service, standards of staff performance and so on. It is not an assurance of financial standing or professional competence, and was never set up to be so. Such evaluation will have already been undertaken by official bodies as part of the licensing process."

He says that CPT as a trade association represents the interests of its members by acting as "an interface between legislators, regulators and enforcers at international, national and local level; secondly by acting as an advice and assistance body; thirdly by providing services of benefit that add value to the core membership services."

He says the CPT "is not, never has been, is unlikely ever to be, a regulatory body for the industry."

Olympic coaching

Ahead of an imminently expected announcement on (some) of the coaching arrangements for the 2012 Olympics, the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) has given *CBW* readers the inside line on contacts in the organisation.

The ODA recently appeared before the Transport Select Committee inquiry into Olympic Transport and reported that its department was now almost up to speed.

To express interest and be kept informed of progress and developments, coach operators should contact: Paul Neal, head of Olympic Family & Surface Transport (paul.neal@london2012.com) or Allan Edmondson, fleet manager, Olympic Family (allan.edmondson@london2012.com).

Briefly

Hexagon Group subsidiary SwePart Transmission has taken over Scania's Sibbult factory, and the manufacture of some gearbox components. Operations start in the second half of 2007, initially employing 50 people.

MAN Nutzfahrzeuge, Neoplan Bus and its marketing agency are being counter-sued by the maker of the Zonda A9. The German company is in the process of suing the Chinese manufacturer over the alleged similarities between the A9 and the Starliner, but the latest suit was sparked by comments on an on-line blog made by the head of the marketing agency who claimed, "this is a vivid example of how rapid and uninhibited the Chinese are when it comes to copying".

Excursions 2007 has confirmed visitor numbers at this months show at just under 1,000 and celebrated by re-booking the venue, Alexandra Palace, for next year's exhibition, on Saturday January 12th 2008. For more information on next year's show, contact Fran Downton at Tourism South East on 023 8062 5409.

Research by Yorkshire Bank reveals that 32% of travellers planning short break holidays on the continent will not buy travel insurance. The study claimed that around 54% of British holidaymakers are set to buy their summer break during January while prices are low.

Five top operators will lay on free coach travel to VisitBritain's British Travel Trade Fair 2007, held on March 13-14 at the NEC. Anderson Travel is operating from London, WA Shearings from Cheshire, Macpherson Coaches from both Leicester and Derby, Bakers Coaches from Sheffield via Nottingham, and Edwards Coaches from Cardiff via Bristol and Gloucester. For further information visit www.britishtraveltradefair.com or phone 0845 226 7542.

Briefly

The first 'pay-by-how-you-drive' insurance scheme in Europe, from Lloyd Latchford, will come on stream for coach and bus operators in the third quarter of 2007. The system builds a driver profile and allows insurers to assess driving behaviour. This can cut accident costs and claims and gives the potential for a 'profit-share' rebate of up to 15% on insurance premiums. Contact Phil Gallagher on 01329 847340.

Battery supplier LSUK says a lead price hike means there may be a national shortage of batteries this winter. Mark Poole, LSUK's battery product manager says: "The worldwide demand for lead has substantially exceeded available stocks and we know that a number of high-profile distributors already ran out of some batteries." Tel 0114 250 2244.

For the first time, London's school teachers have been invited to attend the annual British Travel Trade Fair (BTTF). The call comes after the SoS for Education Alan Johnson recently announced new money to encourage out of the classroom learning. BTTF 2007 is being held at the NEC on March 13-14.

A school bus was hit head-on by a giant 20m oak tree in Lamberhurst, Kent last Thursday. The incident happened along the B2100, as pupils returning home watched the tree blow over into their path and spear the lower deck of the vehicle. None of the children received major injuries, but the driver, who was trapped against the steering wheel, was taken to hospital.

The Scottish Labour Party wants to crack down on the use of chauffeured vehicles and taxis by ministers and officials. The Executive spends £575k a year on costs related to its fleet of cars and has spent almost £1m on vehicles since the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

Optare joins mobilicity project

New partnership means 'big step forward' for driverless bus

Optare has become a partner in Capoco's driverless bus project - the mobilicity PPT system.

With its well-established design and manufacturing capabilities, Optare will be involved in the development of the environmentally-friendly vehicles, which will use remote guidance technology to navigate their way without the need for dedicated bus lanes or other expensive infrastructure.

In September 2006, Capoco announced that Frog Navigation Systems BV of The Netherlands, which has provided a range of automated transport systems for passenger and goods transport, had signed a Memorandum of Understanding to jointly collaborate on the design.

"With both Optare and Frog on board, mobilicity has taken a big step forward in being a credible provider of unique solutions to the fast-developing opportunities for pollution-free, low cost personalised public transport provided by intelligent 'driverless' buses in city centre operations," says Alan Ponsford, Capoco's design director and the creator of mobilicity.

Optare's chairman, Russell Richardson, says: "Capoco - with whom we have worked successfully for many years - have made a real contribution to the future of the bus with mobilicity and we are delighted to be able to play a role in this revolutionary project. Our manufacturing, engineering and design skills will be core to providing a vehicle which will be durable and reliable and which passengers will want to ride in."

Capoco Design has pioneered its mobilicity PPT (Personalised Public Transport) concept, at a time when automated, demand responsive public transport systems are attracting international interest from urban transport operators keen to reduce costs. Already major transport undertakings have expressed an interest in mobilicity PPT.

A model of the mobilicity PPT system, developed in conjunction with the Royal College of Art, is now on show in the Antenna science news feature at London's Science Museum.



Artist's impression of the Capoco driverless 'bus'



TfL has published the route for the start of the Tour de France, the section of the world famous cycle race being held in the UK this year. The event takes place over two days - the route above is Stage One, held on the second day, Sunday July 8. Before this, on Saturday, is the Prologue, a five mile lap of central London ending on the Mall. Mayor Ken Livingstone says: "The Tour will be great for London, showcasing the UK capital to the world and bringing huge amounts of visitors to London." www.tourdefrancelondon.com.

Government 'lacks focus' on transport

Britons pay more for transport than any other country in Europe and despite heavy investment, transport policies aren't working, according to the Centre for Economics and Business Research. In a survey conducted for the BBC, the CEBR said more than 15% of disposable income goes on transport - 3.8% on bus, rail and plane fares.

Doug McWilliams from CEBR says money has been ploughed into buses, but they are 35% less full than 20 years ago. "We are not going to solve the transport problem overnight, however I think we can criticise all governments, and particularly the present one, for a lack of focus."

Transport Secretary Douglas Alexander puts this down to the UK being a lightly-taxed economy. "There's really two sources of funds for public transport. There's the taxpayer and the fare payer, and your report focuses on the fare-payer," he told the BBC. "It doesn't recognise that the UK is a relatively lightly-taxed economy, and if we want to see the kind of investment that's needed in our public infrastructure then we're going to have to pay for it."

* New research says the average UK household spends less than £10 a week on public transport. According to mortgage company First Rung the average total weekly spend for all purchases is £443, with £9.90 spent on rail and bus fares.



VDL's headquarters in Eindhoven

Good year for VDL

VDL says 2006 was another good year after a record breaking 2005 - turnover was up, but profits were hit slightly, says the company, by the costs of switching to Euro 4/5/EEV engine technology.

In 2006, less city buses were supplied than in 2005, namely 1510 buses, 1110 chassis and 193 mini and midi buses. With a market share of 7%, VDL occupies 6th place in the European bus market..

Compared to 2005, turnover from the bus and coach division rose slightly from €568m to €591m. An end of year statement from the company reads: "Profit, however, fell slightly. This was primarily due to the transition from Euro 3 to Euro 4/5/EEV. There were problems in the development and supply of these engines, leading all in all to higher costs."

With the transition now made, the company looks forward to 2007. The statement continues: "Expectations for this year are positive. Given the well-filled order book at present, and considering the excellent results in 2006, we look forward to 2007."

The combined turnover of the VDL Group - which has interests in many other manufacturing industries - rose from €1.156bn in 2005 to €1.338bn in 2006, an increase of almost 16%. Results after tax will be approximately €60m, as compared with €50m in 2005.

Arriva continues Shrewsbury depot fight

Arriva Midlands' Shrewsbury depot is continuing its fight for survival. As reported in *CBW* last autumn, the site has been slapped with a compulsory purchase order as part of the project to redevelop the town's historic Flax Mill, which stands behind the depot. It is one of the final sites needed for the scheme spearheaded by English Heritage.

In the latest twist, Arriva Midlands has formally appealed against the order to Shrewsbury & Atcham Borough Council.

Arriva spokesman Keith Myatt said: "We made the decision to appeal about 10 days ago. The location of the current depot in Shrewsbury is ideal for our operation."

"It has worked very well for Arriva Midlands and for our predecessor Midland Red since 1920," added Mr Myatt.

Ironically English Heritage's website says the conservation body 'exists to protect and promote England's spectacular historic environment and ensure that its past is researched and understood', yet a 1920s bus depot still carrying out the purpose for which it was built is apparently not unique enough. It has emerged that English Heritage has now decided which developer will deliver the project, but bosses are remaining tight-lipped until next week.



Tony Lewis is confident that the new web-site is a winner

LDV launch used sales site

LDV - in conjunction with its 70-strong dealer network - has launched an approved used sales website for van and minibus operators.

The new website - www.1000vans.com - will sell vans from every manufacturer including Ford, Mercedes, Citroen, Iveco and Volkswagen as well as LDV's Maxus.

Sales & Marketing Director Tony Lewis says: "The purchase of any used vehicle from the 1000vans website has the assurance that it is backed by the UK's specialist light commercial vehicle manufacturer and is supported in service through the best in class aftersales programme delivered through our nationwide group of dealers."

The site will be updated daily with pictures, prices and specifications all posted. All vehicles will be subject to LDV's Vanguard Programme, which includes a full service, MOT, HPI and mileage check. Finance plans are also available, as is a range of options, including sign writing and sat nav.

Briefly

Pensioners and disabled people in Lancashire could see rises in the cost of bus fares to travel between districts. Council bosses are considering implementing the changes after underestimating the popularity of a concessionary scheme. More than 225,000 people take advantage of the concessionary fares. District leaders said the fare structure was proving too expensive and may increase the flat fare contribution of 50p for trips outside the district fivefold.

Vouchers offering free bus travel have been sent in error to thousands of people in Cheltenham. Stagecoach intended to send 26,000 free weekly bus passes for the D service connecting Hatherley and Warden Hill to Bishop's Cleeve. But a marketing mishap occurred when the company used postcodes to mark out its target area. Stagecoach bosses says it will honour all passes.

Traffex, the international transport design show, and Parkex, Europe's leading exhibition for parking technology and products, are 95% sold out with three months left until the shows. The NEC will play host to the shows on April 17-19 and 280 exhibitors from 30 countries have already signed up.

Sixty five coaches brought a total of 3,300 supporters to Charlton Athletic's home game against Middlesbrough last Saturday - the highest number so far this season. The Valley Express service covers over 60 pick-up points in the South East, charging a return fare of £5, regardless of distance.

The operator of Northumberland's Alnwick Roadtrain will start paying commission to those bringing coaches to visit the town's attractions. The commission is based on a coach delivering a minimum of 20 passengers to use the Roadtrain to get around Alnwick during their visit. Call 01665 606093 for details.

Briefly

Accountancy firm KPMG is to offer its 10,000 employees an Oyster card this month to encourage staff to opt for public transport rather than using cars and taxis. It will pay the £3 deposit – staff will pay their own fares.

An Oxfordshire biotechnology company is set to develop a new low-cost 'next generation' biofuel. Green Biologics Ltd plans to develop a way of manufacturing biobutanol, identified as a superior 'next generation' biofuel for transport, which will slash the cost of production by up to a third. Biobutanol is currently used as a chemical feed for stock but high production costs have prevented it being widely used as a fuel.

Tantivy Blue Coach Tours director Mike Cotillard has said Connex's school services in Jersey are unacceptable because too many children are being forced to stand. Education bosses say they do not want crowded buses carrying children to school and have told Connex to sort out the problem by the start of next week.

Derby's bus station will finally be demolished next month, to make way for a £95m development on the site. Derby's city cabinet agreed to knock down the station at a special meeting last week.

Cheshire County Council has said the initial roll out of its ITSO-enabled travelcard project has gone very smoothly. The deployment includes low-cost card media alongside conventional products, as part of a research contract being undertaken for the DfT in conjunction with Applied Card Technologies.

John Prescott says he regrets the decision to split up his former transport, environment and local government 'super department', which saw transport hived off in 2002. He told a conference that he regrets the break up.

Apology after woman travels two miles in luggage hold

Bus Éireann have apologised to a woman who suffered a "nightmare experience" on January 6 when she became trapped in the luggage hold of an Expressway coach which then traveled approximately 3km (2 miles) with the driver and other passengers oblivious to her cries for help.



The woman was trapped as the coach travelled 3km

The woman, who had climbed into the luggage hold when the coach stopped at Hueston Station to retrieve her bag was trapped when the driver, not seeing anyone near the doors, closed them from the cab and continued the journey to Busarus.

The woman, in her 20s, was reported to be "extremely traumatized" by the incident.

The woman had travelled on the bus from Athlone in Co Westmeath.

Bus Éireann has apologised to the woman, and confirmed that it had carried out a full probe.

"Unfortunately the woman had climbed so far in to the hold that she was unable to stop the door from closing and had to remain there until the door was opened again," Bus Éireann Regional Manager Ken Barry explained.

"This was a very unfortunate incident and thankfully the woman did not receive any injuries during her time in the luggage area.

"We have made a full examination of the bus and spoken to the driver and are happy that an incident like this will not happen again," he said.

Green party aim for national transport authority

The Irish Green Party have launched their transport policy in the run up to this year's general election with a call for an expansion of the LUAS tram system to Cork and Galway, more investment in buses, and a national body rather than the proposed Dublin Transport Authority.

Speaking at the launch of the Green Party's transport policy in Dublin, Transport spokesperson Eamon Ryan TD said: "The remarkable success of the Luas to date shows just how willing the Irish public is to switch to high quality public transport systems. Had the Green Party been in Government over the last ten years, several more Luas lines would already be up and running.

"In Government we will redress the chronic under investment in bus, rail, cycling and pedestrian facilities and we will redirect the roads budget to improve road safety and traffic management.

"At the upcoming election the electorate will be faced with a clear choice; they can vote for the Green Party and for a proper public transport system, or they can vote for the Progressive Democrats and Fianna Fáil, and

yet more spending on roads that are choked with congestion the day they open.

"Last year we spent six times more of our capital budget on new roads than on public transport. Our Government and their economic advisors have got their cost-benefit analyses fundamentally wrong. They justified spending plans on the basis that journey times would be reduced but failed to understand that new roads would in turn generate more traffic thereby eroding most of the benefits.

"Nor did they take into account the real social, environmental and planning gains that come with investment in public transport and the safety, pollution and social costs that come with reliance on a private transport system.

"The additional Luas lines we are proposing in Cork, Galway and Dublin total some 56km. On the basis of previous construction expenditure completing the new lines would cost an estimated €2 billion, which is not currently included within the Transport 21 plan.

"Other big ticket items will be the upgrade of the existing Sandycroft Luas line to Metro

status and the building of a rail link to Navan, instead of the proposed motorway around the hill of Tara. We believe the other public transport projects already outlined in Transport 21 should be completed.

"And we agree with the ESRI that the overall transport capital budget within the next national development plan should not be increased for fear of creating cost price inflation. On this basis we see the funding for our additional public transport projects coming from a reallocation of funds from the other main elements in Transport 21, including the roads programme.

"While the emphasis is always on the big construction projects, it will be equally important for us to get our land-use planning right. Rather than a Dublin Transportation Authority we want to see a national agency set up to work with new regional authorities and ensure that new housing and office projects are located in proximity to transport connections. We will also ensure that bus services are given real priority and that traffic management systems are reformed."



There's one part of an Optare bus that moves slower than the competition



Dramatically rising fuel costs are driving operators to look for vehicles that can deliver proven fuel efficiency. Strong low-weight integral construction coupled with industry-renowned heavy-duty drivelines mean that both the Tempo and Solo deliver class-leading power to weight ratios. Add to this electronically-managed performance and you have buses that are as fuel efficient as they are stylish and reliable. Indeed, our innovative designs, advanced engineering and precise balance of performance and economy ensure that every Optare bus looks as good on your bottom line as it does on the road.

Briefly

■ The number of roads needing repairs in York has fallen by over two-thirds in the last three years, but a significant backlog remains. Classified roads requiring work dropped from 32% in 2002/03 to 10% last year, while unclassified road repairs have now achieved the government's target. The council has bid for Private Finance Initiative (PFI) money to boost the rate of repairs.

■ The father whose daughter and son-in-law were killed in the accident at Ingoldmells on the Lincolnshire coast in 2004 has set up a branch of Roadpeace to offer support and counselling to other bereaved families. "The aim is to help victims of road deaths and injuries. Support comes from people like myself who have experienced it at first hand," said Neil Cooper, from Mansfield, Nottinghamshire.

■ Bradford Council transport chiefs will meet with the Minister for Roads, Stephen Ladyman, to discuss the Steeton - Frizinghall stretch of the A650. The Highways Agency wants to pass responsibility for the road to the council and has offered an £800,000 sweetener. This has been rejected as a "drop in the ocean". The council wants upgrades to improve access to the Saltaire World Heritage Site.

■ Parked cars are being blamed for the suspension of some evening bus services on the Isle of Man. Buses have been forced to turn back after getting stuck in narrowed roads in Pulrose. The Department of Tourism and Leisure is campaigning to get car drivers to be more considerate.

■ Roads Minister, Stephen Ladyman, gave the go-ahead to improve the notorious junction 6 of the M62 on Wednesday. The £38m scheme will ease congestion and further improve the economic regeneration of Merseyside. The improvements will provide two new link roads to increase the capacity of the junction.

Cardiff operators back controlled parking zones

Council to press ahead in the face of public opposition

Two Cardiff operators have come out in support of a highly-controversial plan by the city council to introduce controlled parking zones (CPZ) and decriminalisation of parking enforcement. Both Cardiff Bus and Veolia Transport say the plans are essential for the free running of public transport.

But campaigners have called the CPZ plans "an insult to local people" and "political suicide for councillors".

Cardiff Council wants to introduce the zones in six areas, but residents and businesses have objected and will hold local referendums on the issue. The council has watered down proposals in the face of protests, but is determined to go ahead.

Managing director of Cardiff Bus, David Brown, says: "Cardiff is becoming one of the most congested cities in the UK, with congestion and the accompanying environmental pollution acting

as a stranglehold on the economic development of the city. Maintaining the status quo is simply not an option."

He said the council has set out its priorities as being residents' parking and short-term shoppers'/visitors' parking - all properly and effectively enforced.

"By mid 2007 our entire fleet will be comfortable, lowfloor and easy-access, among the most modern and highly-specified fleets anywhere in the UK and Europe," said Mr Brown. He warned, however, that Cardiff Bus could only deliver an effective service if buses can move freely in and around the city centre. Vital to achieving that is proper parking management and effective enforcement.

Nicky Vincent, of Veolia Transport - whose subsidiary Shamrock was fined £55,000 for poor reliability shortly before it was acquired - told *CBW*: "We totally support anything Cardiff City Council does in terms of improving the traffic flow, which will greatly improve the efficiency of operating our local bus services."

Quite how Cardiff residents will react to the possibility of a Congestion Charge Zone - as discussed at a recent conference in the city - is not known.

Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the principality, Gwynedd County Council will take over responsibility for parking enforcement from North Wales Police from April this year. Among other advantages, the council says it hopes the new arrangements will lead to bus operators encountering less illegal parking in bus stops and will also improve the flow of traffic.



Cardiff Bus managing director, David Brown

Warning: steep road ahead...

The A170 Thirsk to Scarborough road - one of the steepest trunk roads in the country - is now the subject of a major road safety campaign.

The North Yorkshire County Council, police and the FTA are warning operators and drivers of large vehicles about the difficulties regularly encountered on that section of road: three sections rise at 25%, or 1 in 4 - as steep as the infamous Porlock Hill in Somerset.

County councillor, Peter Sowray,

executive member for highways, said: "The problem with Sutton Bank, particularly if you are unfamiliar with the road, is that drivers can be misled into thinking they're 'over the worst', because the gradient varies from one section of the road to the next.

"They engage too high a gear, too soon, and then find themselves stuck, with no way of moving any further forward.

"We need to get the message across that Sutton Bank is one of the steepest trunk roads in England, and that using it requires considerable care."

"The principal advice for HGV drivers is, at the bottom of the bank, to engage a suitably low gear that provides flexibility to increase or decrease speed without further gear changes ...

and stay in that gear until you get to the top."

Four thousand leaflets and posters are being distributed to highlight the problem. New signing has been put in place, and a new anti-skid surface has been laid on the most difficult section of the bank - a hairpin corner - with trials being carried out to evaluate its effectiveness.

New hi-tech solutions like special signs activated only by large vehicles, and variable message signs, are being considered for the future.

In an average year, 120 HGVs fail to make the ascent and require police assistance, with another 400 large vehicles experiencing difficulties, and finding themselves delayed for up to four hours.



bus and coach sales

Volvo coach

- 2001 Volvo B10M Plaxton Paragon - 49 seats, air conditioning, double glazing, toilet.
- 1997 Volvo B10M Excalibur - 46 seats, air conditioning, automatic, white, rear floor mounted toilet, CCTV, courier seat, choice of 3.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 49 seats, drinks machine, courier seat.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee - 47 seats, rear floor toilet, rear servery, TV/video.
- 1996 Volvo B10M Premier - 53 seats, air conditioning, courier seat, double glazing.
- 1994 Volvo B10M Jonckheere - 49 seats, centre sunken toilet, drinks machine, air conditioning, continental door.
- 1994 Volvo B10M Caetano Algarve - 53 seats, courier seat, MOT.
- 1989 Volvo B10M Duple 320 - 53 seats, toilet, courier seat.

DAF coach

- 1997 DAF SB3000 Plaxton Premier - 51 seats, automatic, courier seat, seat belts, toilet.
- 1994 DAF Bova Futura - 70 new Cogent seats, three point belts, air conditioning, new MOT.
- 1989 DAF SB290 Plaxton Paramount - 53 seats, MOT.
- 1988 DAF MB290 Duple 320 - 52 seats, MOT.

Scania coach

- 1999 Scania L94 Irizar Century - 49 seats, air conditioning, automatic, courier seat, long MOT.
- 1998 Scania Irizar Century - 49 seats, air conditioning, automatic, courier seat.
- 1994 Scania K124 TRB Irizar - 49 seats, air conditioning, TV/video, courier seat, toilet.
- 1988 Scania K93 Duple 320 - 55 seats, courier seat, new MOT.

Dennis coach

- 2002 Dennis R series Plaxton Panther - 53 seats, courier seat, new MOT.
- 1995 Dennis Javelin Plaxton Premier - 53 seats, air conditioning, courier seat, destination, new MOT.
- 1995 Dennis Javelin Plaxton Premier - 50 seats, toilet, courier seat, new MOT.
- 1994 Dennis Javelin Caetano Algarve - 70 Cogent seats, three point belts, new conversion.
- 1994 Dennis Javelin Neoplan Transliner - 53 seats, automatic, air conditioning, MOT, choice available.
- 1989 Dennis Javelin Duple 320 - 49 seats, courier seat, MOT.

Other coach

- 2003 Mercedes Sprinter 413CDI Mini Coach - 16 seats, sprint shift, air conditioning, tinted windows, large boot, outstanding condition.
- 2003 BMC Probus - 35 seats, air conditioning, DVD monitor, fridge.
- 2000 Toyota Optimo - 15 seats, air conditioning, courier seat, outstanding condition.
- 1999 Mercedes 0814D Vario Autobus - 24 seats, large boot, soft trim, MOT, clean condition.
- 1998 MAN Berkhoff Axial - 33 seats, courier seat, TV/video, fridge, drinks machine, toilet.
- 1988 Setra 215 HD - 49 seats, toilet, courier seat, drinks machine, servery, new MOT.
- 1988 Cummins Van Hool T815 - 49 seats, toilet, drinks machine, TV, courier seat.

Service buses

- 2003 Dennis Dart Plaxton Pointer 2 10.7m - 37 seats, wheelchair ramp, single door, super low floor.
- 2002 Dennis Dart Caetano Nimbus 10.1m - 31 seats, dual door, TFL specification, choice available.
- 2001 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7m - 40 seats, single door, white, MOT.
- 1999 Mercedes 0814D Beaver 2 - 22 seats, airport racked, power door, MOT.
- 1998 Scania L93 East Lancs 12m - 49 seats, step entrance, single door, white, MOT.
- 1997 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7 m - 25 seats, airport racked, single door.
- 1997 Dennis Dart East Lancs Spryte 10.7m - 25 seats, airport racked, dual door, choice available.
- 1997 Dennis Dart Marshall 10.7m - 37 seats, single door, super low floor.
- 1996 Mercedes 0814D ALX 100 - 27 seats, power door, destination gear, large choice available.
- 1981 MCW Metrobus Decker - 71 seats, dual door.

Accessible vehicles/minibus

- 2001 Mercedes 413 CDI UVM Treka - 16 seats, rear/side entrance, sprint shift, tail lift, choice available.
- 1997 Renault Master Minibus - 16 seats, power door, MOT, white, good value.
- 1996 Mercedes 308D - Ex London Dial-A-Ride, 7 seats, rear/side entrance, Ratcliffe tail lift, automatic, choice available.
- 1995 Mercedes 609D - Ex London Dial-A-Ride, 13 seats, rear/side entrance, Ratcliffe tail lift, automatic.

Large selection of	Dennis Dart Pointer	1990/91
	Dennis Lancs	1992
	Optare Excel SLF	1997

All with MOT and ready for service. Pre-order now to avoid missing out!



1999 Dennis Trident East Lancs Lolyne

69 seats, ZF automatic, dual door, TFL specification, graffiti free, re-paint and door conversion available, choice of 6.



1998 MAN Noge Catalan Band Bus

16 bunks, air conditioning, toilet, driver's bunk, full sound and vision package, full servery, luxury leather seating, outstanding value.



1997 Volvo B10M Plaxton Excalibur

49/53 seats, demount toilet, air conditioning, continental door, double glazing.



1995 Volvo B10M Van Hool Alizee

67 seats, 3x2, lap/diagonal belts, courier seat, double glazing.

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Regional News

CBW takes a look at the big issues where you live in our round-up of the regions. If you've got a local issue you would like us to cover, contact Andrew Peace at andrew.peace@rouncymedia.co.uk

SCOTLAND

According to the *Edinburgh Evening News*, bus drivers have been caught jumping red lights 70 times in the last year. Five drivers were caught speeding. Both **First** and **Lothian** say they have disciplined all offenders.

■ The driver of a broken-down **Megabus** forgot there were passengers on the top deck when a replacement arrived to continue the journey, turned around and took them back to their departure point. The Glasgow - Aberdeen service developed a problem with its windscreen wipers when bad weather struck north of Dundee. A spokesman for Megabus apologised for the mix-up.

NORTH

A compensation fraudster in Liverpool has been foiled by on-board CCTV. Mother of ten, Anneesa Naser, 40, said she had suffered back and neck injuries after being thrown into her seat when her **Arriva** bus was clipped by another service.

She was seeking £10,000 in compensation - instead she is waiting for sentencing after being found guilty of attempted fraud. CCTV showed she had in fact been standing in the queue at the time. Her solicitor told the court she was stressed and having trouble with her neighbours.

■ **Liverpool City Council** is looking to appoint a transport operator for the supply and management of a park and ride scheme to include site management and Inner City Bus Shuttle Service.

It will operate from north and south Liverpool and the Wirral. The tender can be downloaded from the website at www.liverpool.gov.uk. The closing date is March 12.

WALES

One of North Wales' largest operators has announced a £250,000 investment in brand new vehicles for its Wrexham - Whitchurch service.

GHA Coaches of Wrexham has rolled out two brand-new DAF SB120 buses with Plaxton Centro bodywork. The new buses, which cost £125,000 each, are fitted with 40 seats, Euro 4 engines and LED high visibility front, side and rear destination equipment and digital CCTV systems. They also sport a revised version of the previous route 146 branding.

Partners in GHA Coaches Gareth and Arwyn Lloyd-Davies said: "In 2004 we bought two brand-new VDL Merits for

the route to improve reliability. We are now in a position to replace these two-year-old buses with the very latest designs, providing passengers on route 146 with the most modern buses to operate in the area."

GHA operates over 70 buses and coaches from three depots located in Corwen, Ruthin and Wrexham. In recent years, the company has invested extensively in new vehicles, including lowfloor service buses and 70-seater Scania Skool and Plaxton Profile coaches. This latest investment brings the number of super lowfloors in the fleet to 25.

■ The death of a young girl involved in a collision with a bus outside the Golden Gate caravan park near **Rhyl** last year has been recorded as accidental.

An eyewitness told the inquest held last week that the bus had been going too fast, but a forensic examiner told the court it was impossible to say how fast the bus had been travelling. He concluded that the accident was a combination of the youngster's decision to step into the road and the proximity of the bus. The driver was not called to give evidence.

■ The **CPT** and teachers' unions have hit back at the **Bridgend Council's** plan to cut back on its free school transport provision, as reported last week.

The council aims to save £800,000, increasing the distance from schools from where pupils qualify for free transport, and introducing charges for over-16s. Officials have said that they will re-invest the savings in education.

LONDON

Mayor Ken Livingstone has hit out at the operators of Croydon's Tramlink, and ordered **TfL** to lay on extra bus services to help alleviate problems on the service.

The row centres around recent increased demand on Sundays, and Tramtrack Croydon's alleged refusal to put on more services. The mayor also says maintenance is lacking, and that some services have been reduced.

Mr Livingstone said: "The Croydon Tramlink has been a great benefit to the people of Croydon, Wimbledon and the areas of south London it serves, carrying around 24m passengers a year. But this has been despite of, rather than because of, its operator, Tramtrack Croydon.

"I have asked TfL to provide extra bus services to help alleviate overcrowding on some of the busiest



sections of Croydon Tramlink. Extra buses on route 130 to and from New Addington will start in May, and TfL will also, later, put on extra buses going east from Croydon. In both cases this will give shorter distance passengers an alternative, so making space for New Addington residents to get to and from work and leisure in Central Croydon.

"Longer term, I have asked TfL to consider all possible options to ensure that passengers get the Croydon Tramlink service they deserve in future."

SOUTH WEST

Police are concerned about stone-throwing yobs attacking buses in **Plymouth** and say they endanger the lives of the drivers and passengers as well as causing "mindless damage". Twelve offences have been reported on the Embankment Road area of Prince Rock during the last 30 days with similar reports from the Miller Way area of Estover in the north of the city. Police say they will be using a variety of tactics to identify offenders.

■ The **Brixham News** reports that coaches are not welcome at the **Sharpham Estate**, which includes the Sharpham vineyard and cheese dairy, open to the public and offering tours, tastings and a shop for local produce. It is located on the River Dart, three miles from Totnes.

Parish councillor Sue Widdicombe told the parish council that she had seen three large coaches in convoy using the narrow road to the estate and was concerned that vehicles were

Briefly

■ **The Northern Ireland Assembly** announced last week it was investigating the feasibility of a Luas-type tram system linking Belfast with Dundonald. It would use the old railway line and link the City Airport Titanic Quarter route with George Best City Airport and the new Harbour Estate.

■ **Norfolk County Council** is urgently seeking a replacement operator for Sunday and evening service on the Norwich - Wymondham - Hethersett - Cringleford - Eaton route after First EC de-registered the route from February 18.

Briefly

Scottish National Party MSP Maureen Watt has tabled a motion in the Scottish Parliament calling for a debate on making seatbelts on school buses compulsory. The move follows a crash between a school bus and a lorry in December in which three children were injured.

An Arriva Midlands driver was flagged down and sprayed in the face with a chemical by a motorist last Wednesday. The 20-year-old female driver of the number 15 bus, in Burton-upon-Trent, was treated for minor injuries.

West Sussex County Council is the latest in a new wave of local authorities proposing a reduction in the provision of free transport for faith school pupils. The leader of the town council in East Grinstead has says the changes will result in only "small savings".

A mechanic at MAN-ERF in Nuneaton was killed on Thursday after becoming trapped beneath a bus. Kevin Chaplin, 36, of Bulkington, was airlifted to hospital but died soon after arrival. The HSE is investigating.



One of two new DAF SB 120 buses introduced to the Wrexham-Whitchurch service by North Wales operator GHA Coaches (see full story below)

"getting bigger" at the estate while the roads had not.

Chris Nicholls, from the Sharpham Trust, said it was "pretty rare" that coaches came to Sharpham, adding: "It's not something we want to encourage. We don't want them any more than anyone else does. We try to discourage them because we don't have the turning facilities."

■ **First Great Western** unexpectedly closed two Cornish branch lines for the week ending Friday January 12 because of a lack of serviceable trains. Replacement bus services were hastily contracted.

At the same time, the Atlantic Coast Line between Par and Newquay was also closed due to emergency engineering works on the line following a landslide after a period of heavy rain. This meant that buses replaced trains on three out of the five Cornish branch lines during the same week.

■ The bus and coach station in England's smallest city - Wells, Somerset - will close for three months from February 5 while essential work is done to improve safety.

Bus stops will be moved, and temporary coach parks will be used. **NatEx** services will use five temporary stops on Priory Road and Princes Road, while visiting coaches will have a pick-up point in Priory Road; the drop-off point in Sadler Street will remain the same. A temporary free coach parking area will be provided.

The move follows meetings between **First Bus**, the district council and the Health and Safety Executive, after passengers were able to wander into turning areas and passengers were thought to be unprotected in the event that vehicles overrun stops.

Five bus departure bays will be repositioned, protection barriers, fencing and gates installed and new lighting, surfacing and kerbing areas created.

EAST

Masked robbers in Peterborough tricked a driver into leaving his cab before beating and robbing him of his takings. A passenger also had her handbag snatched.

The attack occurred at 17:30 last Saturday, on the **Stagecoach** Citi4 service. Police have described it as the number one robbery they are investigating in the city.

■ Pupil and parent power has led to the reinstatement of a school bus service, dropped late last year with little notice.

Nine pupils refused to go to school, and wrote letters in protest to their local council.

Primary school children in the village of Rougham, West Norfolk, had traditionally filled empty seats on the service - to avoid a two-mile walk down a pathless road to neighbouring Weasenham. The bus then went on to a secondary school further on.

But the council withdrew the service with two weeks' notice in November after reports of overcrowding. After a review, it emerged that the overcrowding occurred after the Rougham children had been dropped off. The children are now allowed back on the bus, but will have to pay.

■ **Local Link** service 404, which links Peterborough with surrounding towns and Stamford - introduced on a trial basis last July - has now been extended.

A Peterborough City Council spokesman told **CBW**: "We're pleased with the way it's running at the moment. It is particularly popular with walkers." The service operates using PCC-owned **Optare Solos**.

The First Choice operated service replaced the Village Link eight-seater taxi bus service operated by Better Cars and the Kimes Service-operated routes 9A & 9B.

Roadworks

■ M6 Lancs / Cumbria

Until January 31: Ongoing roadworks between 31A(B6242) and J42 (A6). Also at J44.

■ M60 Greater Manchester

Current: Roadworks at J1 (A5145) and J2 (AA560).

■ M55 Lancashire

Until February 22: Roadworks at J1 (A6) and J3 (A585).

■ M1 South Yorkshire

Until October 31: Roadworks between J31 (A57) and J32 (M18).

■ M1 Herts / Beds

Until December 31, 2008: Roadworks both ways between J8 (A414) and J10 (M1). Also around J13 (A421) until March 27.

■ M25 Waltham Abbey

Until December 31: Roadworks between J25 (A10) and J26 (A121).

■ M5 Devon / Somerset

Until May 3: Roadworks between J24 (A38) and J30 (A376).

■ M5 Gloucestershire

Until May 6: Roadworks between J8 (M50) and J9 (A46).

■ M27 Hampshire

January 27 only: Night roadworks around J4 (M3).

■ M2 Kent

Current: Roadworks between J5 (A249) and J6 (A251).

■ M4 Gloucs/Wilts

Until February 28: Roadworks between J16 (A3102) and J19 (M32). Also between J24 (A48) and J25 (A4042).

■ M6 West Midlands

Until August 31: Roadworks between J8 (M5) and J9 (A461).

■ M5 West Midlands

Until February 28: Roadworks between J1 (A41) and J2 (A4123).

■ M41 Leicestershire

Until March 16: Night roadworks between J23A (A42) and J24 (A453).

■ M42 Worcestershire

Until February 22: Roadworks around J3 (A435).

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Receivers called in at UK North

Future of troubled independent operators UK North and GM Buses hangs in the balance after bank pulls the plug

Manchester independents UK North and GM Buses, which had nearly completed four weeks of suspension on the orders of North Western traffic commissioner Beverley Bell, returned to her Golborne offices last Friday, knowing that their bank had pulled the plug and appointed a receiver. The companies had to face unresolved issues of repute and professional competence, and a report from VOSA traffic examiners, as well as a report from an individual who had submitted an 'undercover report', which had effectively prevented them from having their 'indefinite' suspension lifted, a week earlier.

Company representatives had met Mrs Bell in chambers last Thursday (CBW, January 17) and presented preliminary analysis from the first of its training advisors, David Taylor, who had undertaken driving assessments on those company drivers whose ability was judged to merit possible improvement. The companies had continued their work with Pride Training and consultant Stuart Maclean, who made driving assessments and conducted seminars for drivers on walk-round checks. Nevertheless, after further deliberations, the new evidence submitted to the traffic commissioner, led to a refusal to raise the suspension.

The companies had also submitted an appeal to the Transport Tribunal, for a stay of suspension, but this was not accepted either and the matter was referred back to the traffic commissioner.

The suspension, which started at midnight on December 22, was extended indefinitely at the reconvened public inquiry on January 2. Allegations made by VOSA traffic examiners Chris Howorth and Cath Rigby of the Western Intelligence and Targeting Directorate that the company had broken drivers' hours regulations were heard on the first day of the inquiry. Their information had been gleaned from records seized at the company premises in November

and were immediately challenged by solicitor Chris Charlesworth, who said that they had "simply got it wrong". The VOSA traffic examiners then asked for more time to study duty schedules and new information submitted by the companies, which showed that all drivers were getting their required 24 hours off duty every fortnight, and the two examiners were given until January 19 to submit their findings, and a further day was set aside for the reconvened hearing on that date.

Much of the third day of the public inquiry was spent "in camera" with the public and observers excluded. Mrs Bell also took the unusual step of bringing a financial assessor with her to share the bench, but no evidence from him or the traffic examiners was heard in the open. Evidence from only one witness was

The Traffic Commissioner said she'd taken the unusual step of inviting a financial assessor to attend

heard, after which the solicitor for the companies announced that receivers had been appointed and the companies were no longer able to satisfy the conditions of financial standing. Putting to one side her findings as to repute and professional competence, Mrs Bell revoked the two companies' licences, but allowed 28 days grace, in case any other parties wished to take over the licences and apply for a lifting of the suspension orders.

UK & North Enterprises Ltd and Greater Manchester Buses Ltd, both of Unit 3, Taw Works, Gorton Lane, Manchester, and its two directors Vincenzo Casale



UK North: After months of troubles, the bank has pulled the plug and the receivers have been called in

and Ernesto Casale, returned to the third public sitting of the reconvened public inquiry to consider regulatory and disciplinary action resulting from an unsatisfactory maintenance report, prohibitions received, an apparent failure to adhere to undertakings given, and a material change in circumstances. Concerns regarding professional repute of the transport managers, professional competence and financial standing were also under consideration.

At the start of proceedings Mrs Bell said that she had taken the unusual step, within her powers, of inviting a financial assessor to attend. She said that she had dealt with most matters in the public inquiry, but had not yet ruled on repute, financial standing or professional competence. She said that she had only received a report from Mr Howorth and Ms Rigby at 10:15 that morning, and had therefore delayed the start of proceedings to allow all parties to study the report. She reminded the inquiry that she had been approached, and had held a meeting in chambers the previous week, but declined to lift the suspension order. She also said that there were statements before her from Mr Cummings and Mr McConnell.

Responding on behalf of the companies, Mark McGhee said that there were items contained in the VOSA report that had been gained from an interviewee under caution. He said that this matter should be avoided to enable original matters to run their course without prejudice. Mrs Bell replied that she was well versed in aspects of criminal law and would discuss matters in private, if that suited both parties. The inquiry then went into camera, and the public was excluded.



Giving evidence in public, John Cummins, who said that he was now a bus driver, said that in March 2006 he was contracted by the BBC to make an undercover investigation into the operations at UK North. He said that he had gone to the company to seek employment, was told to come back two days later, and taken on a test assessment which involved him driving around the block. He said he was asked to come back two days later, to start work. When he came to work he saw a bunch of Polish drivers, who could not speak English, with a team leader who could, and he was filling out their forms and ticket machines. He also thought it unusual that drivers had to return their module keys.

He said that after two days route learning on the 42 and 192, he started service on the 192. "At no time was I asked for my licence to be examined," he said. "I found the Polish drivers' driving to be substandard, and my conclusion was that the driving standards of foreign nationals was

poor." Mr Cummins recounted an incident at Piccadilly when it took him 15 minutes to "make an inspector aware that I was out of my hours". He said that he was told to work over his hours (by a named employee), and to run to Stockport, turn short and then have his break. He didn't say whether he had actually operated, or whether he had actually gone over his hours.

Under cross-examination, Mr Cummins said that he had made the statement this year, between one or two weeks previously, but could not be precise about the date. "I chose to put my views in writing and made the statement for VOSA," he said. He explained that the BBC had approached him one month before the investigation started, because of his experience in the industry, and produced a pay record of his contract with the BBC. He said that he had been told to gain employment to assess whether there were problems or not, spent three weeks at UK North, and had supplied tapes, which had been destroyed, as he wasn't getting what the BBC wanted. It was pointed out at this time that no programme along these lines was ever made.

Questioned about his assertion that the driving standards of foreign nationals was poor, Mr Cummins replied that he had ridden with Polish drivers on two occasions and he found that they drove erratically, and on two

Mr Cummins said he had ridden with Polish drivers on two occasions and he found that they drove erratically

KEY POINTS

Receivers called in at suspended companies after bank pulls the plug

Traffic Commissioner hears that the BBC sent in an undercover reporter to investigate driving standards

Receivers have until February 16 to either wind up the business or sell it as a going concern

occasions drove through red lights. He said that he had ridden with one English driver whose driving was acceptable.

After Mr Cummins and Mr McConnell (who was not needed) were dismissed, Mr McGhee explained that the previous day Vincenzo Casale had been called by accountants Croll, who had been appointed as administrators by bankers Lloyds-TSB. "UK North had an initial overdraft facility, and a group facility covering GM Buses, but in view of this, the company is no longer able to satisfy its financial requirements."

Making her judgment, the traffic commissioner said that VOSA had concerned itself with the vehicles themselves and drivers keeping to hours' rules. "Personally, I am concerned with the training of all drivers," she said. "I had anticipated that today I would be making a decision, after giving VOSA 28 days to deal with it in the coolness of their office, but they still maintain their stance and need more time to complete their investigations."

She said that matters had developed and other investigations were ongoing, and the only way to proceed safely was to allow the other investigations to continue to their conclusions.

Putting to one side her findings on repute and professional competence, Mrs Bell revoked the two companies' licences on grounds of financial standing to become effective at 23:59 on February 16.

"This gives the administrator an opportunity to assess the business and either wind it up, or sell it as a going concern. The suspension order remains in force until that date, and an approach from a going concern has to come to me to lift the suspension."

Mrs Bell said that she would deal with the matter in eight weeks time, if matters were concluded in respect of VOSA and Greater Manchester Police.

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Open platform

by Sue Reynolds

Prime destinations?

PM Tony Blair should set an example by taking his family on holiday in the UK, says Sue Reynolds. There's so much he's missing out on...



So, Tony Blair defends to the end his absolute right to take long-haul flights and take his holiday wherever he chooses...

For now I'll ignore the environmental arguments and the complete hypocrisy of his personal rights compared to his party's intended green policies for the rest of us. As Prime Minister of these lands, surely one of his first duties is to act as an ambassador for Great Britain and Northern Ireland? What better way could there be to promote this country than for its Prime Minister to select it as his holiday destination of choice?

In a world where long-haul travel is so cheap, too many people tend to forget the treasures that can be found in our own back yard.

If Tony Blair wanted to bask in memories of the music of his youth, I am sure with free accommodation from the in-laws' in Liverpool, 'The Beatles Story Experience' would not have let him down. This living history tour is committed to providing a world-class visitor attraction that lives up to the universal acclaim of the Fab Four - what more could he have asked for?

Our previous long-lasting Labour PM, Harold Wilson, won four General Elections and was seven years in office. He set a great example by taking his holidays on the Isles of Scilly.

And let us not forget that both the Queen and the Secretary of State for Transport chose Scotland for their 2006 summer breaks.

Excursions 2007 provided a clarion call to all of us involved in domestic tourism. Thankfully, our customers are not looking to emulate the Blair family.

The hundreds of group organisers that I chatted with on Saturday had

their feet firmly planted on British soil. If the positive buzz of interest and enthusiasm is anything to go by, 2007 is going to be a great year, both for the fascinating range of venues represented and for those of us who are going to supply the coaches to get them there.

During the day, I discovered that in the UK last year more people visited a museum or gallery than visited a football match. In 2005, this was a staggering 25 million people. And if you were not among them, you may be one of those stuck with the childhood memory of stuffy, dark buildings filled with bones and dusty static displays.

Historically, museums were developed from the private eclectic collections (their 'bling') of fascinating exotica brought home by the rich and famous, and intended for private viewing by the studious and curious. One had to apply to the porter for a ticket; unsuitable applicants were politely turned away. But not any more - I urge you to make a resolution to visit at least one museum or gallery in 2007. They have become amusing, exciting, interactive places.

In 2006, the Gulbenkian Prize was won by Brunel's ss Great Britain display in Bristol. The purpose of this prize is to recognise and stimulate originality, imagination and excellence in museums and galleries in the UK, and increase public appreciation and enjoyment of all they have to offer. The ss Great Britain was deemed by the judges to be outstanding at every level. They said: "It combines a truly groundbreaking piece of conservation, remarkable engineering and fascinating social history plus a visually stunning ship above and below the water line.



Sue Reynolds
is a director of
Watford-based
Reynolds Diplomat
coaches

If you want to let off some steam, just tap away at the keyboard and send your rant (or carefully-reasoned views) to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk, or fax 0845 280 2927. Make 'Open Platform' the subject line. Alternatively, send your missive to: CBW, 3 The Office Village, Cygnet Park, Forder Way, Hampton, Peterborough PE7 8GX

Most importantly, the ss Great Britain is accessible and highly engaging for people of all ages."

Many venues, particularly stately homes, now offer their restaurants as a quick stop for coach groups. This gives us the chance to make the tea stop a pleasant component of the day out; improved as they are I have yet to find a motorway service area offering so much charm. And these smart venues have realised that this provides an opportunity to tantalise the group and encourage a return for a full day's visit, as well as just a little more revenue from the gift shop and tea room.

My regret about Excursions 2007 was that we were so busy on our own stand that I could not get away to find out what the others had to offer. The very little I managed to see included old favourites, all offering new reasons for repeat visits. Less well-recognised towns and destinations made me realise just how many opportunities I have missed from my own 2007 brochure.

The concept may date back to an age before New Labour, but it is not outdated. The overwhelming feel at Excursions 2007 was one of 'Backing Britain'. And for this they do not need the hassle of long haul-flights - what they need is a strong coach industry.

Customers will continue to travel with us if we remain focussed on offering innovative day visit and holiday ideas to whet their appetites - and ensuring we deliver the product as promised.



IN THE NEXT ISSUE...

- Focus on coach and bus Finance ■ Profiles of Konectbus and Busabout
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The rich get richer

I wonder if this happens all over the country? The other day there was a train derailment and land slip in the Gloucestershire area, a lot of operators were called out to cover the rail replacement, no problem.

Many were small operators who changed work around, called in part-time staff and made arrangements for the following few days, as they were led to believe that the repairs would take at least three days. At approx 17.00 we were told that a large coach company was going to take over this work (well he had to put two coaches on). The small operators had responded only to be kicked in the teeth and told, you will not be needed tomorrow as Mr X has been given all the work (some were not even told). We had pulled together to sort the job out, then after the mess had been sorted into a timetable he steps in. Is this fair? I think not. All I will say is he was once in our position and don't forget it is a long way down when you fall.

A very annoyed small operator

Belt up? Not me!

Regarding an article written in your magazine by a Mr Alan Payling to do with belting up on coaches. I am fed up with all the stuff from management and the media about making sure passengers are wearing their seat belts... No way. It is not the drivers' responsibility to make them wear them.

Passengers can see them when they sit in the seats and if they choose not to put them on, fair enough. As for me (the driver) I've been sat behind this steering wheel for over 40 years now and I am fed up with coaching and people like Mr Payling calling us 'silly prats' for not wearing our belts. There is no way I am putting my belt on.

Dennis AJ Hooper

January 24 in history:

1860 French inventor Etienne Lenoir was issued a patent for the first successful internal-combustion engine.

1965 Sir Winston Churchill died at the age of 90 with his wife Lady Clementine Churchill and other members of the family at his bedside.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

I wrote once before on the rules, or the lack of, for children on school transport and the dangers that have been proven to exist and why do we not have rules or laws to protect our next generation. We had BUSK (belt up school kids) that were the body taking up the cause, but it seems like something has knocked them off course, and as I have said before we have and are having more legislation in and coming in from Brussels to protect live stock than our next generation!

What is wrong with our industry, BUSK, and the government and yes Brussels cats, sorry bureaucrats in Brussels, does nobody care about the next generation, or parents about their own children?

Everything I see is just lip service or a knee jerk reaction to another accident, how many more before we have some strict rules/laws in place like the new piece of legislation that is for livestock that has just come out of Brussels.

Here is a brief summary from Motor Transport regarding the latest piece of legislation to protect our livestock, all vehicles

will have to have satellite navigation fitted by 2009 to make sure journey times are not exceeded, also compulsory training for drivers to cope with all the legislation, all vehicles to have water on board & temperature monitors to ensure the comfort of the animals being carried.

When was the last time you saw anything from Brussels regarding the carrying of children on PSVs, we should have compulsory ratios for escorts to pupils, maximum duration of time for home to school journey and set standard of vehicles all of which are in place for animals, I know it's said the British think more of their pets but I think this is taking things a bit too far.

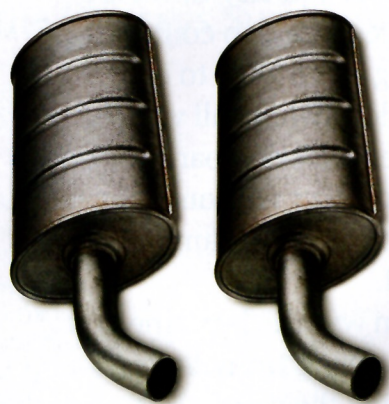
I hope this provokes a bit more thought from the powers that be, this piece of legislation came on the back of another coach accident in which injuries could have been avoided had the laws been stricter & more in touch with transport & vehicle specification of the 21st century.

Tony Hill, The Impact Group Plc

CBW replies: I'm sure many will agree with the gist of Mr Hill's sentiments, although I'm not sure I'd point the finger at BUSK. Pat Harris (of BUSK) has done much in a short space of time and certainly her organisation is widely respected in school transport circles.

WIN A BUS! Sort of... Drop us a line and if your letter is chosen as our Letter of the Week, you'll receive a top-notch coach or bus model courtesy of our friends at Corgi. Please try to keep your letters under 200 words. The editor's decision is final.





Have your say on the London Low Emission Zone

We'd like to hear your views on the proposed Low Emission Zone.
This scheme could affect lorries, large vans, coaches, buses and minibuses which would have to meet certain emission standards when entering the Greater London area.
To find out how it could affect you call 0845 722 4577 or visit tfl.gov.uk/lezlondon before the consultation closes on 2 February 2007.



Transport's reality check

While the media concentrates on trivia like TV's reality show Big Brother, transport is being ignored. But the way things are on the political scene at the moment, that may not be such a bad thing...

Perhaps there are times when it is just as well that transport does not enjoy a higher political and media profile than sometimes we would wish. Reading last Sunday's papers, I was struck that there was almost no coverage on any transport issues - the only informed article I could spot was a piece in the *Sunday Telegraph* reporting on European Commission proposals to introduce a European-wide green tax on motorists.

Media and political attention is elsewhere - "cash for honours", the Home Office shake-up and, of course, Big Brother. However, I find it disturbing that we can give so much media attention to ridiculous TV programmes such as Big Brother (why anybody bothers to watch this, or why our media give the programme the oxygen of publicity its programme makers die for, is simply beyond comprehension). But it is even more disturbing that our politicians feel the need to even pass comment on it. The fact that Gordon Brown felt it necessary, let alone appropriate, to comment on the programme once, let alone three times, is a clear indication not only of the power of the media in this 24 hour TV age, but also of the paucity of the media's views as to what is relevant and newsworthy.

In the meantime, our ministers and officials in the DfT can quietly get on with the job in hand, unfettered by media intrusion, apart from the odd flurry of attention from time to time. Progress is now being made with the development of the detailed proposals emerging from the bus policy review, now that DfT has announced the membership of the working groups that will take this work forward. The brief debate in the House of Lords on January 17 on buses, initiated by the Liberal Democrats, also gave the sense that the degree of political differences between the parties on bus policy was less extreme than one might have thought - although whether this holds good for the more politically-volatile atmosphere of the Commons remains to be seen. Nonetheless, the relative silence from the more extreme Labour backbenchers who would prefer a strong regulatory regime, does suggest that even they

may realise the game is up!

Elsewhere, work is continuing with the development of congestion charging, and the location of trial areas for testing charging technologies as well as the identity of technology companies to run them, can be expected come the summer or early autumn (subject to Labour leadership and Cabinet reshuffles not interfering).

On the rail front, DfT continues to make progress with various rail franchise competitions, no doubt helped by the fact that the whole process is managed in such a way that the ability of ministers to interfere in the process is strictly limited. Come the end of August we will have new operators in place for the East and West Midlands franchises, the new Cross Country franchise and, indeed, the replacement of GNER on East Coast. And TfL will have appointed

Does Labour really want to go into the elections on May 3 with the Prime Minister in the thick of a serious police investigation?

an operator for the North London Line franchise. Given the complexity of the issues around rail franchising this is impressive progress - and shows what can be done when ministers are merely on the fringes of the issue!

Progress with Crossrail is also rumoured, where it is understood that the project team has managed to find savings of £4 billion - yes billion - on the project costs. This is good news, as surely it must now mean that even the Treasury can't stand in the way if almost a third of the previously estimated capital costs have been shaved off the scheme. But you have to ask how it is possible for a project's costs to spiral to the level they did, creating real doubts over its fundability, if all along something rather cheaper was possible.

Somebody, somewhere, has a lot of explaining to do.

Proposals to give the regions and the PTEs greater power over rail are also said to have been agreed, and presumably an announcement will be made shortly - although if I was a regional interest here, or a PTE, I am not sure I would be dancing in the streets at this, since it seems unlikely that with extra "power" will come any additional resource.

I make no apology for this diversion away from bus and coach issues into the railways, since it shows what can be done on a day-to-day basis when the media and political spotlight is elsewhere. If it wasn't for the fact that Douglas Alexander is a Scottish MP, and deeply involved in the developing campaign for the Scottish parliamentary elections on May 3, it may even be that we would see faster progress on some wider policy issues which require considerable political attention. Indeed, I think officials in DfT will see less and less of Mr Alexander over the coming weeks - and Tom Harris too, quite possibly - given the serious threat to Labour being presented by the Scottish National Party.

And the political problems now once again engulfing No 10 over the "cash for honours issue" following the arrest of Ruth Turner on Friday, has the potential to seriously destabilise the government, and force an earlier change in the leadership than Tony Blair would wish.

Does the Labour Party really want to go into the elections on May 3, with serious campaigning starting in just a few weeks time, with the Prime Minister and his team of advisers at No 10 in the thick of a serious police investigation? Surely not.

In this column I have previously argued for transport having a far higher profile in Whitehall - and thus in the media - than is currently the case. That remains true at one level given the need for transport to secure a greater share of the public expenditure cake.

Right now though, the current political and media agendas don't seem to be doing transport any harm at all. Political and media interference? Who needs it!

The Riddler



PORTRAITS: WWW.MARKBOURDILLON.COM

Meet... Hasse Johansson

Last week *CBW* was granted a rare interview with Scania group vice-president and head of research and development, Hasse Johansson. Andy Sutcliffe was the man trying to remember his A-level physics!

AS: How do you see fuels and engines developing over the next few years?

HJ: Let me elaborate a little on what I've said before. Alternative fuels is something I think we will see more and more in the future and I believe in five, ten, even 15 years, we will have a situation where different alternative fuels will play different roles in different markets. In Sweden for example we have more than 15 years of experience now with ethanol-fuelled buses. So that's a viable alternative as a reliable solution. We have a high-performing engine that's a direct-injected ethanol engine, which is much more efficient than the ethanol car engines. The difference is that we cannot use E85, we have 95% ethanol and then we have an ignition improver - a chemical substance that we put in to enable it to run in a direct injection engine. This gives us almost the same efficiency as a diesel engine, which from an energy point of view is

a better solution. Then in some areas we have an excess of natural gas. Even if we say that natural gas is something that really should be used on stationary systems like power plants or engines for generator or alternator applications. Because to carry these heavy bulky tanks under pressure which take time to charge and refuel, it's difficult. It makes sense when you have biogas available for a CO₂ natural fuel and we also have experience of that from Stockholm

It would be better to mix ethanol, gasoline, RME and diesel to get the biggest CO₂ decrease

where they use about 5-10% biogas. The rest is ethanol for their inner city traffic to be quite CO₂ neutral.

Then we will see synthetic diesel coming step by step, in a mixture. RME with diesel fuel. We believe that the mixture is absolutely the right way to go in terms of the CO₂ issues. Because then you can use whatever CO₂ neutral fuel is available in high quantities. And you really gain decreases of CO₂ emissions. Instead of as we do now and manufacture dedicated engines for different fuels. Even if we have the ethanol engines on the buses, it would be better to mix ethanol and gasoline and RME and diesel fuel to get as much CO₂ decrease as possible. Because we can run with these mixtures on the existing engines we don't need to do anything. But this does not seem to be obvious to the people who are concerned with the environment. They want to have dedicated, pure CO₂ neutral fuel power



trains or propulsion systems which is not necessary to achieve what they want to achieve

AS: So do you see reducing CO₂ as the big challenge?

HJ: I would say so. Because now we are close to the compulsory situation for Euro 5 a couple of years from now, and we know Euro 6 will come in the time frame of 2012-13. We don't know exactly what the level will be, but it will likely be in the range of the US10 level [the most stringent US CO₂ emission standard] and we are prepared for that and after that even if we speculate around something like Euro 7 I think that when we reach Euro 6 you can almost forget about NOx and particulate emission. The key issue is the CO₂.

AS: Is that because NOx levels are getting so low that it leaves CO₂ as the problem?

HJ: Yes. The NOx level and the particulate level are so small that it's actually very difficult for us to measure. We need very sophisticated laboratories. It's so small the variations are very hard to catch.

AS: it sounds like you don't need persuading that there is an issue with CO₂ emissions and global warming?

HJ: Everyone has to take the responsibility even if you can argue there are different opinions. The only thing we know is that we are launching more CO₂ than ever. Even if the vehicle industry is not the biggest part of the emission problems - it's just a couple of percentage - but nevertheless, I think we are responsible to understand what this is and if we think we can do something we should really do it. It's fair to say we have our responsibilities.

AS: Given the amount of work companies such as Scania have done with Euro 4, 5, 6 and beyond, do you think the transport industry is overly targeted by the environment lobby? As you say, it is only a couple of per cent of the problem...

HJ: Exactly. What is important is that you have to understand for what benefit you are prepared to leave the CO₂ in the atmosphere. This is always a compromise. If you read about it you can say that the passenger car traffic has not been increasing its total CO₂ emissions over the last ten years. But if you look at commercial vehicles, the transportation industry's emissions have increased, because transportation has increased and our welfare and standard of living needs a lot of transport. We should have some sort of way of talking about CO₂ in terms of tonne/km, or something like that, a specific measure so you know what you get for the CO₂

emission. Then you have to balance the acceptable private car emission... or should you decrease that because you need the transportation to keep the standard of living? This is a balance for the politicians to start talking about - what do we want - because we can never cut CO₂ emissions completely. You can reduce it and you can manage it, which I think is the first step. I think carbon trading is one where you can do it and probably the transportation industry and the car industry has to be part of that trading as well to be able to manage the amount of CO₂ for the best purpose or the best compromise.

AS: With issues such as pollution is it important for a company such as Scania to be seen as being ahead of the game?

HJ: If it is a benefit for our customers to be ahead of legislation then we will support our customers getting the opportunity. Like the system in Germany, where if they are one level ahead on emissions they get some discounts on the road tax for example, and of course we had to have that product ready for them. That's very important, but it's a pure business opportunity for us to keep our

Everyone has to take responsibility [for global warming] even if you can argue there are different opinions

customers happy and gain more new customers by having something our competition doesn't have. That's the normal competition game.

AS: Away from 'conventional' engines, are you working on hybrids?

HJ: Yes we are spending money on developing hybrids. When we talk about hybrids I would say that for me it's rather a discussion about moving from combustion engine propulsion systems to electric propulsion, because a hybrid is just an electric propulsion system. And an electric propulsion system is in many cases a better solution than a pure combustion engine propulsion system, because the behaviour of an electric motor is that you have maximum torque already at zero rpm, so you really don't need a gearbox for example, which is a benefit. So when we're talking about hybrids you can >

say that the base is an electric vehicle. The key is how to generate the electric power on board the vehicle. You can do that with a conventional combustion engine with an alternator, you can do it with a fuel cell, with hydrogen and oxygen, or you can do it with a high-performance battery. The problem is that the high-performance battery is not there yet, nor the fuel cell and the hydrogen and oxygen. So the only option right now is the combustion engine and the alternator. And why not start with that, because the next step could be either a battery or a fuel cell when you know how to generate the hydrogen, which is really the issue. I believe that we will solve the technology for a high-performing fuel cell; we are almost there, more or less. But how do you create and generate the hydrogen? That's the key issue. Battery? Ok - we know there is a lot of activity going on in the consumer electronics field, for example NiMH batteries for mobile phones - one day it will be suitable for this application and then we will have the next big step in the propulsion system for a vehicle.

AS: Do you yourself have staff working on batteries or is it a case of striking strategic alliances?

HJ: We have relationships with other companies. We have no staff activity going on ourselves in terms of the development of batteries, that's too big a step. In the long run it could be possible, because if this is the way for the future I think we will need to be more strategically involved in both electric motor development and manufacturing. This is the same way as we are running our combustion engines today; we are digging into the key elements of that like the turbo-charging technology, the emissions technology the fuel injection technology. I think we'll need to have the same approach when it comes to electric motors, to fuel cells - whatever it is in the future - even if it's a long way to go.

AS: And if you were a betting man, where would you put your money?

HJ: This will not be a revolution. It will be a lot of small steps and there is still tremendous potential for the conventional diesel engine. There will be another 25 to 50 years of development and improvement of that technology. The battery starts to be useful now as a complementary addition to the combustion engine and the alternator. So you have both now, which is a pretty complex and expensive solution. You can have a battery which you

can recharge overnight in the garage and you can use that for as long as it can survive and then you can use the combustion generator for the rest of this electric-propulsed vehicle. For the first step, I would bet my money on the conventional technology, but a little bit on this step-by-step approach. And then you can always speculate on what could happen. Eventually they could find the real solution with the battery technology or on the electric motor, because one issue with electric motors is that you have electrical resistance. You still have conventional copper wires in the motor that means that the motor, for a certain power (let's say 50-100hp), has a specific size and you have power losses in the wire. The Ohmic resistance is really key. And if we can reach a level of super-conductivity

We have 400 engineers trying to improve fuel economy and we win half a per cent a year

at room temp (20-25 C), which means we have almost zero resistance in the wires, then we can load with a current like 10,000 amps without any specific high level of losses, which means that then all of a sudden you can create an electric motor of a small size with 100 hp. But the question is whether it will take another 50 to 100 years to reach this point. Sooner or later I am convinced that we will be there.

AS: Away from the engines, Scania has a reputation for the quality of the driver's environment. Will we see more technology trickling down from luxury cars, such as head up displays and such like?

HJ: We are launching right now adaptive cruise control... we are launching lane departure warning... we are launching tyre pressure monitoring... we are also launching something called economic cruise, which takes care of the energy you gain down hills and uses it up hills. Conventional speed control tries to keep you at the same speed, so if you are below the speed it's pushing you and if you are above the speed it is braking. By expanding these tolerances so you don't have to push the pedal all the time you are a little bit below or you don't need



Born in 1949, Hasse Johansson joined Scania in 2001 from Mecel, an automotive software company he founded in 1982. Mr Johansson sits on Scania's main board and is in charge of the company's R&D function. He holds a masters degree in Science and Electrical Engineering from Chalmers University.

to brake all the way back to the speed set if you are a little above then you can gain a little bit of the energy downhill and keep it for the uphill. We have done a lot of interesting testing there and over some topographies and some customer applications they can gain up to 5% fuel economy. There are a lot of small things you can do all the time.

AS: It seems like a lot of work goes in to achieve some very small gains?

HJ: I used to say that we have around 400 engineers working every day trying to improve the fuel economy and the result of that is that we win half a per cent every year. It's not much, but it has to go on. And it's becoming more and more difficult to catch this half per cent. Every year you have to add more resources and have more ideas. But that's the only way: there is no leapfrog. I don't believe in any revolution. Hopefully it's quick steps and that's the benefit of competition, because the competition keeps you busy. From an R&D point of view, I like competition because I can go to my boss and say: 'Look what these guys are doing, I need some more budget!'

AS: Can you give me an idea of the scale of Scania's R&D facility?

HJ: We have around 2,000 people. We are all together in Södertälje. Almost all in one building, which is a great advantage.

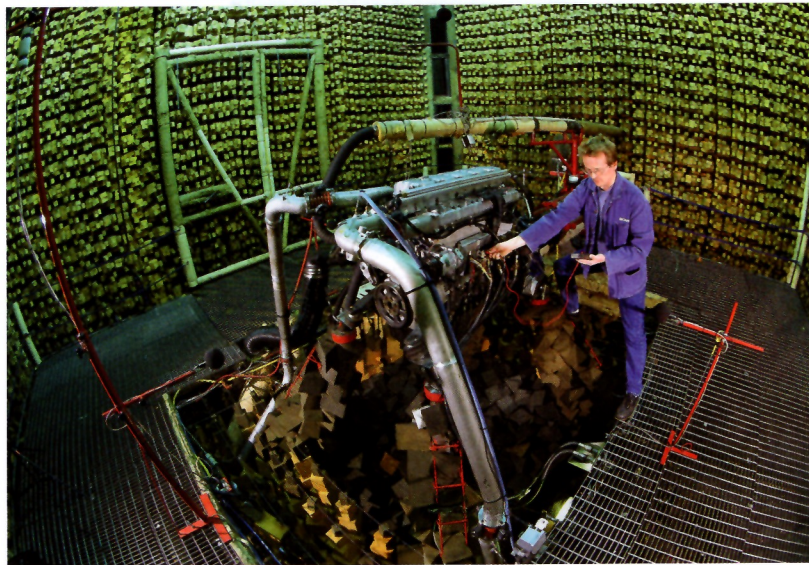
AS: And money?

HJ: Around 4% of turnover [Scania's revenues were around SEK63 billion in 2005, giving an R&D budget of about £200 million]. If you go back in history you can see this has averaged between 3-5% over the last 30 years. We have always been able to manage the competition, the customers' needs, the legal requirements, etc, on this 4%. But remember, we have grown as a company all that time so the actual budget has increased. Over the last five years we have expanded by about 100 people each year.

AS: You joined Scania in 2001 from Mecel, a company you founded yourself. Why did you make the move?

HJ: Mecel started with my invention, an ignition system for Saab cars - the Saab direct ignition system. And then we developed an engine management system for Saab and then engine management systems for trucks and bigger vehicles. We became more and more a software house developing engine management systems.

If you are as interested in technology as I am, all aspects of technology, this company was pure electronics software



Moving manufacturing or assembly to a low-cost country would create difficulties

rather than the mechanical part and what was exciting about Scania was that you have the whole scope, from the really big mechanical stuff like the 600hp engines and gear boxes all the way to single precision mechanics like in the fuel injections system where we talk about spray holes in the injectors the size of a human hair. On the other dimension you have all these electronics. This hybrid technology where we're talking about 2,000 amps down to the sensors where we talk about micro amps, one millionth of an amp - this for me is very, very fascinating. Also, all the telematics technology coming in to the vehicles is very interesting.

AS: Vehicles are clearly getting much more complicated...

HJ: [Laughs] Complex! Not complicated. There's a difference! Yes I agree they are becoming very much more complex. But complexity should not be difficult you must learn to manage complexity. But not complicate it!

AS: OK, complex! Does this present problems for bodybuilders using Scania chassis?

HJ: It is more and more difficult for a bodybuilder to bolt bodies onto our system. Of course it's up to us to

generate an interface which is plug-and-play for them, but that means they have to learn more, they have to be more skilled and experienced to be able to do this in an appropriate way. I think that our customers are the major driving force for this. They say: 'I don't want to have the situation where I have to buy a chassis and then go to a bodybuilder and try to decide exactly what I want to have there with him. And then if something doesn't work I don't know whether I should go to Scania and blame them or the bodybuilder. I want to have a complete vehicle from you, you have to choose the specification.' I think that's the way we'll see the future and in fact we are preparing step by step to follow that route.

Scania's research and development facility is located in Södertälje, Sweden. The vast site includes test tracks (above left) and a wide range of test facilities such as this engine acoustic bay (left). The Scania Irizar (above) is pictured having its ESP functions tested. Around 2,000 employees work in the R&D department of Scania. Mr Johansson points to the geographic closeness of the R&D facility to a large part of Scania's manufacturing as being a key part of the company's competitive advantage.

AS: So could we expect Scania in the future to offer a wider range of vehicles?

HJ: Yes.

AS: How do you view the rise of countries such as China and India in terms of being emerging power houses of manufacturing. Is it becoming harder to compete?

HJ: I think there are two levels. One dimension of this is the low-cost countries - the low salary countries - and in that case our philosophy at Scania is that if we can keep the labour costs of our products - whether it's engines, gearboxes, axles, whatever - in the range of 12-15% of the total cost then we will still be able to manage the competition with production from Sweden. Because even if you can get one third of the labour costs moving to India or China or Russia it would not give you so much of the total product cost but it would give you a tremendous risk of not being able to keep the quality and the knowledge that you need. One of the key elements at Scania is that we have the R&D located in this one place, close to the engine manufacturing, close to the gearbox manufacturing, close to the chassis assembly plant, just a few hundred metres in between and we have a very tight cross-functional work method. So therefore we think that moving manufacturing or assembling to a low-cost country, and still having the R&D and designers sitting in Sweden would create difficulties and therefore we think it's better to be as efficient as possible in terms of labour costs for each of the components. In fact we've moved a lot of manufacturing from Holland back to Sweden. On the other hand, when you have really labour-intensive work like for bus bodies then there is no chance to come down to this 12-15% labour cost per body. Then the only way is to move the manufacturing. That's why we moved the bus building down to Poland - that was the only solution.

AS: Obviously the truck side of Scania's business is the major part of the company, how does the company, and therefore the R&D function, divide up between truck and coach and bus?

HJ: Last year it was around 65,000 vehicles in total. Around 59,000 trucks and 6,000 buses and coaches.

The truck side drives things. Out of the 2,000 people we have in the R&D area, around 130 are working on bus development, bus chassis development. And we have another 30 people working on the bodywork. ●

Government grants and support

With over £5 billion of grants available to business there may be something for you. Adam Bernstein takes a look at the world of grants

There are many times when a business may need money and advice. It could be for a start up, expansion or new idea. But apart from the traditional bank why not look at the Government's grant and support network?

It's estimated there is around £5 billion-worth of grants and programmes of support that you can tap into. But actually getting your hands on the help and money is not easy. You will find obstacles in the form of competition for limited monies, strict criteria that must be met and the fact the schemes are constantly changing and expiring.

Hurdles

No one is going to knock on your door to offer money – you have to go and get it. And you need to know that Government grants are normally for projects that are at the planning stage. If you've already started on the new idea it'll be too late.

Each programme will have its own strict terms and conditions that apply to all applicants. These govern, for example, the use of the monies, what happens if the business stops trading, and, if repayments are due, when they are to be paid. Recipients of the help can expect to face demands for immediate repayment if the rules aren't followed.

Like a bank on the high street that insists on commitment before it'll lend, so the providers may well require proof of your commitment. You may only get part of the money you need – the organisation behind the assistance expects you to be able to match its commitment with your own money. After all, if you aren't prepared to stump up some money, why should the public purse give you any?

The proportion you get will vary according the funding programme and, as for the difference, it will be up to you to source from places such as a loan, an issue of shares or from a new investor.

Sources

Grants and assistance programmes are made available by the Government through the various departments, the European Union, various Regional Development Agencies throughout the UK, local authorities, local development agencies, Business Links, Chambers

of Commerce and County Enterprise Boards. There is also some funding distributed through colleges and the Learning and Skills Council.

Types of grant

There are numerous types of grant available:

1. Direct grant – cash for a given project;
2. Repayable grant – monies given are to be repaid from future revenues;
3. Soft loan – better terms and interest compared to the high street banks;
4. Equity finance – where the provider gives money in exchange for shares that they can sell at a profit later;
5. Free or subsidised consultancy;
6. Access to resources – where the business can access publicly-owned facilities;
7. Technology transfer – where the business gets help in taking the development to market;
8. Best practice transfer – where the business is helped to improve its standards;
9. Shared cost contract – where businesses are helped to group together to split the costs of projects;
10. Subsidies – where approved products and services are subsidised;
11. Advice and information;
12. Packaged assistance – where some of the help above isn't delivered singly, but as a package;
13. And competitive awards schemes – a chance to score PR plaudits by winning an award.

These grants are channelled in various ways. Some encourage investment in innovation, research and development; others to specifically help small businesses.

Others help with training and skills through the Learning and Skills Council as well as the Business Links. If you want to employ New Deal candidates or training of young people you can get help through Jobcentre Plus.

Age and inexperience needn't be a bar to getting help. Indeed, assistance and funds are available from The Princes Trust to those who may be unemployed, or employed in a part-time or low-paid job, are aged 18-30 and have a business idea.



GRANT ELIGIBILITY

Naturally with public monies that are on hand as cash or support, there needs to be a series of criteria to be met before awards can be made.

Your location counts. Through regional economic variations, social and financial needs, businesses in some parts of the UK get extra grants. Further, to attract businesses or maintain employment in the local economy, some local authorities offer their own grants.

The size of your business, in terms of either number of employees or turnover, may have a bearing on eligibility. A lot of grants are deliberately limited to small or medium-sized enterprises – those with fewer than 250 employees.

It shouldn't be a surprise to know that Government and local authorities wish to encourage certain industry sectors, while they feel others do not need any assistance. Also, the European Commission places limits and checks on the help that some sectors receive.

Grants are invariably awarded for a specific purpose such as buying plant and equipment, improving working accommodation or developing export markets. Other uses will be barred.

Each grant or help provider will have its own criteria, so don't assume that because you've been rejected by one provider, that you are barred from others.

NEW DEAL

Employers can receive subsidies and training grants to assist with the costs of recruiting and training young people who have been unemployed for six months or more. The value of this is up to £60 per week for six months for taking on a full-time employee; up to £40 per week for six

months for taking on a part-time employee; and up to £750 towards the cost of certified vocational training. Potential employees must be between the ages of 18 and 24 and have been unemployed for six months or more. www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/New_Deal_for_Young_People/index.

The whole ethos behind the giving of grants is to stimulate business activity and this is the reason why a business based in an 'assisted area' may be able to get extra grants if they can help with regional development, urban regeneration or an improvement in local employment prospects.

Find the grants

As you can imagine, the growth of the internet has made it much easier to find out what is available online. You can get much of the information for nothing, although some is chargeable.

Through the Business Links website you can search through the Grants and Support Directory for nothing.

Spending some time will reveal that there are several thousand programmes available, at all levels - national and local - depending on what you want, where you are and so on.

But there are private sector agencies that provide information on available grants and can give assistance in applying for them. However, it is worthwhile searching online and comparing a few different agencies.

Many of them charge a fee or subscription for some or all of their services, but remember: none of them can guarantee success in getting funding for you. To find them, just Google "support and grants".

When dealing with any organisation that seeks payment for its services, check out what they offer, the charges involved, the money you are seeking, and the type of project you need money for as well as their track record.

But why would you want to pay for advice? They can probably find the appropriate programme for you, and faster too. A good consultancy should be able to help with the technicalities of the application.

SAMPLE PROGRAM

Bus Shelter Grant Scheme - Oxfordshire

Financial assistance is available for the provision of bus stops throughout Oxfordshire. Funding can be used for the creation of new stops, or the improvement or replacement of existing ones.

There are two rates of funding: High Rate (major work): 50% of costs for towns with a population of 2,000 or over, 90% of costs for villages with 100 inhabitants or less; and the Lower Rate (minor work): 20%

of costs for towns of 2,000 or more, 80% of costs for villages of 100 or less.

Those that can apply include local councils, bus companies, residents' associations and other organisations with an interest in public transport.

Costs covered include the purchase of a shelter, construction of hard-standing materials, site preparation and erection costs.

Find out more on www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/wps/portal/publicsite

The application process

Assuming that you have gone through the process of finding the grant you want to apply for, and making sure you qualify, you will want to make your proposal. But before you do, it might be worth making personal contact with the provider.

Remembering that you may have to put some of your own money up, you need to be able to show the specific purpose for the grant. Don't start work before you've been given the green light on funding - you'll disbar yourself if you do. Also, heed any deadlines that you've been given.

If you need any advice when preparing your proposal, consider speaking to an advisor at a Business Link. They'll have more experience and will know how to create the proposal.

Your proposal

Now comes that hard work. You are going to have to provide a detailed description of the reason for the application; give an explanation of the benefits of the project; detail the plan and provide full financial data; provide details of your own experience and that

of your (senior) colleagues; complete the application form; and submit a business plan.

Your application will be judged according to its significance, approach, innovation, your expertise as well as the need for the grant.

You've been rejected...

Rather like a driving test, many fail with their application the first time around. By asking the organisation concerned why you've been rejected will help you when you re-apply.

The reasons applications are turned down include the failure to prove the need for the money, or outdated information. Maybe the plan was poorly written and produced, or the facts weren't backed up. Perhaps the application was made to the wrong organisation.

If you cannot get a grant, you may have to resort to other forms of finance such as the traditional bank loan. Alternatively, you may want to consider selling shares in your business.

With time and planning - as well as the appropriate idea - there is no reason why you shouldn't get what you want.

CONTACTS

- Learning and Skills Council - www.lsc.gov.uk/
- To find your your local Business Link - Call 0845 600 9006 or see www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/directory. Note that the southern Business Links are in the process of being reorganised.
- New Deal - www.jobcentreplus.gov.uk/JCP/Customers/New_Deal/index.html.
- Princes Trust - www.princes-trust.org.uk/
- DTI regional investment - www.innovation.gov.uk/innovationreport/index.asp?lv1=4&lv2=5&lv3=0&lv4=0
- Grants and Support Directory - www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/gsd
- Third party advice - www.is4profit.com/business-advice/finance-money/government-grants-all-about.html
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Educating bus use

Students are a major sector for bus operators. Mark Smulian wonders if bus companies are exploring all the options when it comes to targeting this market

Did you know that there is a market of around 2m very mobile people – and 1.8m of them do not own a car?

A tempting prospect for bus operators? Students certainly should be, because they travel a lot.

What is more, most of them are skint – as political controversies over students fees and loans attest – and so are on the lookout for any bargain offered to them.

Students can be big business, and most operators find it worthwhile to offer them substantial discounts and find a ready response from doing so. Evidence exists that doing so cultivates students as long-term bus users.

There are essentially two ways for bus companies to reach students. One is direct marketing through local advertisements, stalls at universities and deals with student unions.

The other is through the National Union of Students, to which almost all students belong and which offers its members a huge range of discounts on everything from clothes to iPods.

In the discount cards page of NUS' website, the travel section will help students get to the other side of the world, but among bus operators NUS has so far attracted, only Arriva among national operators, although Go-Ahead subsidiary Go North East also promotes its Unisaver ticket there, which is valid only in its region.

Other operators are perhaps missing a trick, since it is free for them to promote their student discounts.

NUS Services sales and marketing manager, Nick Emms, explains: "We have the NUS Extra card, which confirms student status, and when we set that up we approached various bus operators to offer discounts to students, and Arriva accepted.

"The website gives them the confidence that they are selling only to students, and allows them to contact

students by email with various offers.

"Bus discounts are brilliant for students, because they need to get about, and only 10-12% of them own cars."

NUS Services' deal with Arriva is not exclusive, and other operators could join the scheme, says Mr Emms.

His interest is getting as many deals as possible for students, and operators do not have to pay NUS to join, a commitment to offer students a discount is enough to be accepted.

The Arriva deal is a 10% discount on the price of its student ticket – which itself gives a discount on normal fares – when bought online using the NUS card.

"Other operators should apply to us," says Mr Emms. "NUS does not take any commission from them, they just have to offer the discount."

Arriva offers special student tickets in those areas where it provides a frequent service between the main areas of student accommodation and university campuses.

Mike Woodhouse, marketing manager for Arriva UK regions, says: "The students benefit from a lower priced ticket than the standard range, and Arriva benefits since the operational costs involved online is less than via a travel shop, and pre-paid multi-journey tickets enable faster boarding times."

Bus discounts are brilliant for students because they need to get about and only 10-12% of them own cars



Arriva does not have any system for recording destinations, such as smart cards, and so can tell only from research surveys how the student tickets are used.

"We believe the majority use is to and from place of study and home," says Mr Woodhouse.

"But since these tickets afford students unlimited travel, we believe that an increasing number of journeys are being used for leisure purposes like shopping and trips into town.

"One interesting piece of research feedback is that that once students have a period ticket, they use the bus as a 'lifestyle' choice, and would not think twice about hopping on, and then hopping off again a few hundred yards down the road."

Arriva is wary of revealing how many student passes it sells for reasons of commercial confidentiality, but says sales last autumn were 24% up on the same period in 2005.

Stagecoach offers its Unirider tickets in selected university towns shown on its website and it is valid across the area concerned.

Its website illustrates the ticket's attractions by means of the adventures of a fish called Ted, who is stuck in his bowl in what looks like a student bedroom until liberated by the Unirider ticket, which the uses to shop at 'Sharks and Spencer' and visit a pub



where he chats up a mermaid.

Behind this whimsicality lies hard business, says Karen Coventry, marketing manager of Stagecoach Manchester – based in a city that boasts one of Europe's largest concentrations of students.

Unirider is valid in Manchester at all times on all Stagecoach routes and those of its Magicbus subsidiary.

"Competition is intense on the student corridor between Fallowfield, where there are halls of residence and many houses rented by students, the universities and the city centre," she says.

"The volume of passengers is great, and it is worth our while to offer such large discounts."

Uniriders are sold either for an academic year or academic term, which for a yearly ticket works out at £150 for 43 weeks, against a regular price of £408.

Stagecoach Manchester sold 11,000 of the tickets last year. Students simply show them on boarding, though they must also carry student ID.

Even by offering this 63% discount, Stagecoach believes the tickets are worthwhile since it secures the payments upfront and keeps this huge number of potential customers off the services of its main rivals UK North, GM Buses, local firm Bullocks and Yorkshire Motor Services' operator, Finglands.

The tickets are sold on commission through student union offices and through an agreement with Greater Manchester Passenger Transport Executive's ticket office.

Internet sales are expanding and have proved particularly attractive to new students.

When the academic year starts each September, it is all hands to the pump with Stagecoach employees pulled off normal duties to staff stalls at freshers' fairs, where university clubs and services display their wares to new students.

"It is very successful but hard work when we run stalls for about nine working days at each university," says Ms Coventry.

"Stagecoach has graduate trainees and they help us out because they can relate well to the students.

"Our inspectors also work on the stalls, but it is a very hectic week."

Ms Coventry says there is no concrete evidence that Unirider holders become long-term bus users, but says: "anecdotal evidence suggests

they do if they stay on in the city after graduation, as a significant number do.

"They move a little further into the suburbs and commute to city centre jobs."

Go-Ahead, in keeping with its local approach, leaves it to individual managements to decide whether to run student offers.

With two universities in the city, students are too tempting a market for Brighton and Hove Buses to miss, says chief executive, Roger French.

It offers students cardholders weekly tickets for £12 instead of £14.50 and the more popular three-monthly tickets at £110 instead of £125.

There is also an annual version for £300 against the normal £395 price.

Brighton and Hove runs high-frequency routes – not exclusively for students – round the clock from the Brighton and Sussex universities complex at Falmer to the city centre, and which then run to Hove or east Brighton.

Its newest buses, the 93-seater

The student market in Sheffield presents a fantastic opportunity for us to target and promote

Scania Omnideckers, operate the routes.

The company has freshers' fair stalls but sells most of the tickets in shops or on the campus.

Mr French says: "We sell mainly the three-monthly ticket because it fits an academic term and the number that we sell to students is equivalent to the entire adult market. We sell about 25,000 of them."

The term structure could create problems of over-capacity at other times, but Mr French says the students' long summer break is helpful to the company, since vehicles and drivers can be redeployed then on enhanced services along the coast road.

"Brighton is very successful at retaining graduates," he says. "We find that students who became bus users while at university continue to use buses in the city."

National Express' main weapon in the student market is the £10 Young Person's Coachcard, available to 16 to 26-year-olds and full-time students of any age – and offering a 30% discount on long distance coach fares.

This is also promoted with surreal advertising, depicting a cartoon figure holding a set of false teeth and a speech bubble saying: "I love going to see my girlfriend in Norwich. She has lovely teeth".

Those not deterred by that introduction, will find offers of 'fruit-shaped badges' and a choice of trendy card shapes named 'rock', 'surfs up', 'princess' and 'classic'.

First also offers student tickets in university towns. One of the largest concentrations of students it serves is Sheffield, where the company offers them a weekly ticket for £12, valid in Doncaster, Rotherham, Sheffield, north-east Derbyshire and north Nottinghamshire, with holders entitled to buy tickets for only £1 on Sheffield's tram and on services in the Peak District National Park.

Similar term tickets, valid as for the weekly, or just in Sheffield itself, cost around £125 and £100 respectively, depending on term lengths, though the shorter summer term ones are cheaper.

First launched the Route 80 service for students in September and within eight weeks it had carried its 100,000th passenger.

It links students' residential areas at the two universities with the city centre for a 50p flat fare.

Charlotte Hudson-Stott, marketing manager at First South Yorkshire, says: "The student market in Sheffield presents a fantastic opportunity for us to target and promote to a population of around 55,000 individuals.

"Significant emphasis is placed upon this target market segment with products and services specifically developed to encourage student travel with First.

"Marketing activity for students commences prior to the start of the academic year to promote the products and service and planning for 2007/08 is already underway."

Students are to some extent a captive market for operators and those doing nothing, or only a little, to reach them are surely missing out on customers who might even develop a life-long affection for buses. ●

Deliveries

Have you taken delivery of a new vehicle and want to tell the world about it? Email all the details and pictures to cbwinbox@rouncymedia.co.uk or write to the address on page 3

HODSON COACHES

A 28-seat Optare Toro executive minicoach new into service with Lincolnshire operator Hodson Coaches Limited replaces a similar sized Nouvelle that has been the best earner in the fleet.

"We've found that this is just the right size of coach," says John Carter, who runs the family firm, founded in 1919. "The Toro is a natural successor to the 814 Vario-based Nouvelle, which has given us reliable service since 2002 and which, out of a fleet of 15, has consistently earned the most money."

"We're looking for a similar performance from the Toro, which was bought specifically to meet a contract that takes it up to Hull and back each weekday. We will also use it on tours, including the occasional overseas trip, day trips and private hires."

Hodson Coaches specified full-width Esteban Irati seats for the new Toro. All are recliners and come with leather headrests, aisle armrests, grab handles, and integral three-point belts.

"It's going to make the coach more comfortable on the longer trips that it will make," says John. "The luggage space is good for touring, with a high capacity boot and side lockers."

John Westney is the driver of the Toro and he's said to be very impressed by its overall performance.

"He finds the internal noise level to be lower and at 150 horsepower he's got plenty of power to maintain good average speeds and cope with all

conditions. The engine and the ZF five-speed gearbox are well matched to provide optimum performance in all conditions and contribute to good fuel consumption, which is important for a coach that will cover up to 80,000 kilometres a year."

At 8.74 metres in length and 2.44 metres wide, the Toro is a compact vehicle. Optare's coachbuilder partner, Ferqui, builds it in Spain on the proven Mercedes-Benz 0.815 Vario chassis. The all-welded, steel box section structure is very strong and fully meets R66 rollover standards. Other safety features include all-round disc brakes with ABS, an exhaust brake, a Telma retarder and M3 standard seat belt mountings.

Standard interior features include double-glazed side windows with full-draw curtains and deep, full-length parcel racks with air vents. Extensive use of soft trim contributes to the low internal noise level and a stereo radio/CD sound system is fitted. Passenger comfort is further enhanced by air conditioning, a DVD player and a drinks machine. **Operator rating: 9/10** "I hope it is going to carry on where our Nouvelle left off. I am quite pleased with it so far."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz Vario/Optare Toro

Engine Mercedes-Benz 150bhp

Transmission ZF five-speed

Seats 28

Spec DVD player, drinks machine

Supplied by Optare 0870 0330005



PREMIUM TOURS

When Premium Tours recently decided to invest in its own vehicles, it opted for Volvo.

The London-based company, which specialises in sightseeing tours for overseas visitors, has taken delivery of four Volvo B12Bs with Jonckheere bodywork.

Specified with 53 seats, the vehicles feature a 420bhp engine coupled to the Volvo I-Shift gearbox, full climate control, TV/DVD

and PA system and fridges. Toilets will also be fitted later this year.

All of the new vehicles are used on the company's busy programme of tours within London and trips to major attractions outside the capital, as well as on private hire bookings.

Premium Tours' managing director, Neil Wootton, explained: "Our tour work was being handled by some very good quality coach operators but we felt the time had come to invest in our own fleet, which would also give us

control of the quality and reliability of the vehicles and drivers.

"We chose Volvo following recommendations from other coach operators and selected the B12B because of the high specification, quality and the sleek design."

The decision looks to have been proved right. "The coaches have been performing very well," says Neil. "Our drivers are very impressed with the build, quality and willingness of the transmission to work when fully loaded, and



SAFEGUARD COACHES

Surrey-based Safeguard Coaches has brought its first Euro 4 vehicle into the fleet - a Mercedes-Benz Tourino. It's also the first coach the operator runs with a digital tachograph - and its first 36-seater.

"It was important to go with Euro 4 because of our proximity to the London market," explains manager,

Andrew Halliday.

"We have run 39-seaters in the past, but perceived there to be a niche in the market for a smaller coach."

The Tourino features the Mercedes-Benz OM926 engine producing 285bhp, driving through a six-speed manual gearbox.

Inside, passengers enjoy air con and a DVD player.

The style of the Tourino was a major factor in Safeguard's decision to buy. "We wanted a vehicle that





our customers are happy with the comfort of the vehicles and smoothness of the ride.

"We're certainly pleased that we listened to the advice of our industry colleagues."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Volvo B12B/Jonckheere
Engine Volvo 12-litre
Transmission Volvo I-Shift
Seats 53
Spec PA and TV/DVD system
Supplied by Volvo Bus
 01509 217777



STOBART AIR

A luxurious Optare Soroco Plus minicoach is providing high-quality transport for VIP and corporate clients of Stobart Air Limited – a new venture within the Carlisle-based Eddie Stobart transport group.

The Soroco is being used for transfers to Lake District hotels and business locations across Cumbria of parties arriving at Carlisle Airport in private aircraft.

The airport was acquired in April last year by WA Developments International Ltd, which is the parent company of the Eddie Stobart group.

"We are enjoying considerable growth in the corporate and VIP travel market," says Alison Schmutz, aviation co-ordinator for Stobart Air.

"Our clients require a high-quality, seamless service from the point of touchdown to arrival at their hotel or business premises.

"The new Optare Soroco is a key link in the chain, providing luxurious transportation in a relaxing environment where

business discussions can be continued in comfort."

Although normally a 19 to 22-seater, the Air Stobart vehicle has been configured to carry just 12 passengers. Each is seated at a table in a comfortable Fainsa Gaudi Super high-back reclining seat with three-point seat belt and aisle armrest.

There is a small cloakroom at the rear along with a drinks servery and DVD players.

"Our drivers have taken to it very well. The width of just 2.3 metres makes it ideally suited to the narrow roads of the Lake District. At 156 horsepower, it's got plenty of power to cope easily with the local hilly terrain.

The Soroco has been named Beatrix, after the famous Cumbrian author.

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Optare Soroco Plus
Engine Mercedes-Benz
Transmission Five-speed
Seats 12
Spec Drinks servery; DVD player
Supplied by Optare
 0870 0330005



would attract a good, full-time driver. When you spend so much money on a coach, the last thing you want is for it to be sat in the yard," says Andrew.

The vehicle joins a mixed fleet of 35, of which 28 are coaches and seven buses ranging from 29 to 70-seaters.

Mercedes, Volvo and ADL vehicles are all represented on the fleet.

Operator rating: 8/10

"It's early days, but so far

it's promising. Passenger reaction has been positive."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz Tourino
Engine Mercedes-Benz OM926La 285bhp
Transmission G85 six-speed manual
Seats 36
Spec Aircon, DVD & monitor
Supplied by EvoBus UK
 02476 626062



RENDEZVOUS TRAVEL

An Optare Soroco Plus luxury minicoach recently acquired by Rendezvous Travel is opening up new business opportunities for the Norwich-based family firm.

The four-year-old company, run by father and son Fred and John Smith, bought the 22-seater to provide feeder services throughout North Norfolk for Shearings and to do local private hire work. By dual certifying it for a smaller number of passengers and putting in tables, and by having a towbar fitted, they are also able to use it for UK and Continental golf and wine tours.

"It's the right size to suit a wide range of work," says Fred. "We've even used it on our own inclusive tours when reduced numbers have not warranted putting on a full-size coach.

"With the tables in place we can still carry up to 19 and the ability to pull a small luggage trailer means that bulky golf clubs won't be a problem. It's also a nice set-up for corporate work – another side of our business we're keen to develop."

The Soroco Plus has comfortable moquette-trimmed Esteban Irati seats, each with three-point seat belts and all but the back row being recliners. There's a DVD and CD player to provide entertainment while on the move and a public address system with a driver's microphone. A high-capacity Davia air conditioning system ensures that comfortable temperatures can be maintained and tinted side

windows with full-draw curtains add to the pleasant ambience in the saloon.

Based on the Mercedes-Benz 616 CDI extended chassis, the Soroco Plus is a compact vehicle at just 7.6 metres overall length and 2.3 metres wide. The OM612 engine delivers 156 bhp and is well matched to a five-speed overdrive synchromesh gearbox to ensure optimum performance and fuel economy in all road or load conditions.

The Soroco Plus has replaced a 16-seat Soroco NT that gave good service over almost three years. Increased loadings led to the purchase of the Soroco Plus, the arrival of which also co-incided with the replacement of a 24-seater by a full-size coach.

"With 22 seats, the Soroco Plus neatly plugs the gap between my full-size coaches and the minicoaches and people carriers that I run," says Fred. "Being Mercedes-based, I can also get servicing carried out locally and it comes with a three-year warranty, which will cover the time that I intend to keep it."

Operator rating: 9/10 "We have had a few small problems, and there is still a small vibration, but on the whole it's performing well."

FACT FILE

Chassis/body Mercedes-Benz 616 CDI/Optare Soroco
Engine Mercedes-Benz OM612 156bhp
Transmission Five-speed overdrive synchromesh
Seats 22
Spec CD/DVD player
Supplied by Optare
 0870 0330005

Recruitment

The bus and coach industry's job centre

Personnel changes at VDL CBC

The year 2007 has started with a number of changes in the personnel at the VDL Coach & Bus Center. Two new employees have strengthened the VDL CBC team and, in addition, Manon Raynal has joined the Board of Directors. VDL Coach & Bus Center now has a total of 20 permanent employees across branches in the Netherlands, Germany and France.

Manon Raynal has been working since the beginning of January 2007 as Branch Director of VDL Centre Bus & Car in Goussainville, France. Manon studied Commercial Economy at HEAO level and moved to France



Dirk Sarrazijn

in 1990 from the Netherlands where she has worked since 2002 at Kleyn-BOVA France. In her new position as director of VDL Centre Bus & Car, Manon will primarily be involved in strategic and organizational decisions.

Jean François le Carrou started in 1990 at OccaBus as a trader in second-hand buses. He then worked

at Volvo, Irisbus and Scania. Jean François has been working at VDL Centre Bus & Car since November 2006. In this position he is involved in sales of second-hand buses in France.

Dirk Sarrazijn has, since 1995, coordinated the purchase and sale of vehicles in Belgium for VDL Jonckheere and, since 1998, also for VDL Berkhof Valkenswaard. At the beginning of January 2007, he transferred to VDL CBC. Dirk is the first point of contact for Belgian customers. In this capacity he is primarily responsible for the purchase of used buses and coaches in Belgium.

Engineering boss retires

Derek Bradley, engineering director at Stagecoach Lincolnshire retires at the end of this month, after a career in the bus industry spanning 39 years. Mr Bradley (63) joined Yorkshire Traction at Wombwell in 1968.

Brought up in a mining village, he started as an apprentice motorcycle mechanic. His engineering career took him through haulage into buses, and then back to cars and haulage before returning to Yorkshire Traction in Barnsley in 1970. Staying in the bus industry, he moved to United at Redcar as depot engineer in 1979, and to South Yorkshire PTE at Doncaster in 1981. He moved to EYMS as company engineer in 1985, and joined Lincolnshire Road Car in 1990, which by then was a

subsidiary of the Traction Group.

As part of the senior management team, he guided the company to profitability, and stayed with the company when it was acquired by the Stagecoach group last year.

Mr Bradley told *CBW* that during his time he had met a lot of nice people and experienced both the highs and lows of managing a bus company: "I'd like to thank the people in the industry for both their friendship and comradeship over the years."



Derek Bradley

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Dennis Adams joins CBW

New face at CBW

Dennis Adams has joined *Coach and Bus Week* as an advertising representative.

After highly successful stints at Yellow Pages, Auto Exchange and the environment magazine EAST, Dennis brings a vast knowledge of advertising and the media to the CBW team.

Advertising Manager Vicki Culverhouse commented: "I'm delighted to welcome Dennis to the CBW team. As the magazine continues to grow we're expanding our team to better service the advertising requirements of the bus and coach industry. Dennis's proven track record in media, and his wide range of experiences in different markets, will help CBW as we continue to offer our advertisers an unrivalled service."

Dennis will be on the road visiting CBW clients over the coming months and can be contacted on 0773 8542824 or via the CBW office on 01733 293240.

New MD for Acumen Waste Services

Specialist waste management and environmental services company Acumen Waste Services has appointed Kevan Underhill as its new managing director. He joins following the group's recent management buy out from Lloyds Development Capital (LDC).

Kevan succeeds Iain Johnson, who has acted as an interim MD, to enable Acumen to prepare for their management buy out. The company is expert in developing and implementing innovative waste management solutions that minimise environmental impact and generate sustainable cost reductions.

It has secured a string of recent contract wins, including a £1M contract to provide Total Waste Management services to Biofuels plc, over the next three years.

Acumen's chief executive Jonathan Morris said: "Kevan Underhill is joining Acumen as managing director, following successful senior roles in Nalco and Cleanaway. His background is in the waste and chemical industries and he has a strong pedigree in business development supported by his training as a chemical engineer."

Solent appoints new engineering manager

Eastleigh based Solent Blue Line has appointed Steve Prewett as the new engineering manager. Based at the company's Barton Park depot, he will be responsible for the servicing of the fleet of 81 single and double decker buses with a team of 20 staff including engineers, body builders, electricians and cleaners.

Steve, a member of the Inst of Road Transport Engineers, started as an apprentice engineer for a Bristol-based road haulage company in 1971. Having completed his 5 year



Steve Prewett

apprenticeship he then worked for a number of other Bristol operators including a Mercedes truck dealership, until joining Stagecoach in Oxford where he held the post of depot engineer and managed engineering

facilities in Witney and Banbury.

Phil Stockley, area director for Solent Blue Line, says that the company is delighted to have secured the experienced engineer to ensure that the fleet is serviced and safe to provide the important network of 25 services which carries over 8 million passengers each year.

Solent Blue Line was acquired in July 2005 by Go-Ahead. Since then over £1.5 million has been invested in preparation to expand and develop the network to provide an efficient and sustainable alternative to the car.

Operations Manager

London Mini Coaches is seeking to appoint an operations manager. The successful candidate will have a proven track record within the industry, be conversant with current legislation and be required to assist in all aspects of running a small high profile company.

Shift working and weekend duty will be involved.

A competitive salary package is offered, dependant on experience.

Applications in writing with CV to David Phillips at the address below or email david@lmcoaches.co.uk

David Phillips, Director, London Mini Coaches Ltd, Unit 23, Airlinks Ind Estate, Spitfire Way, Heston, Hounslow, TW5 9NR

Tel: 020 8589 0795 Fax: 020 8589 0796

Depot Engineer

South Wales • Relocation Assistance

Following the acquisition of a local business, and the subsequent restructuring of the company's Engineering Management & Supervision, a vacancy has arisen for this challenging position. Stagecoach in South Wales runs a mixed fleet of 67 vehicles from its two depots at Caerphilly and Blackwood.

Reporting to the Engineering Director, the Depot Engineer will be responsible for the two depots' engineering facilities and their staff, setting high quality standards while working within budget guidelines.

You will have appropriate engineering qualifications and proven workshop management or supervisory experience. The job would be ideal for someone who has already managed a small workshop and is looking for a greater challenge and opportunity.

The operating area is rural, but close to the attractive and fast growing cities of Cardiff and Newport, and within easy driving distance of the Brecon National Park, the Gower Peninsula beaches and the English West Country. House prices remain affordable compared to many areas of Southern England.

A competitive salary is offered, with relocation assistance where applicable.

For further information please call David Howe, Engineering Director, on 01633 627041. Applications, including a full CV, should be sent to him at: Stagecoach in South Wales, 1 St Davids Road, Cwmbran NP44 1PD. Closing date: Monday, 12 February 2007.

www.stagecoachgroup.com

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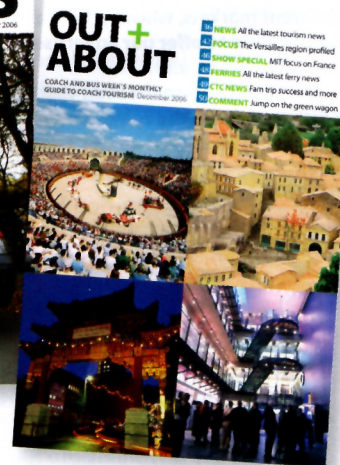
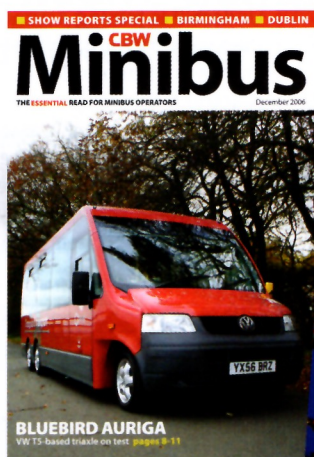
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OUT + ABOUT

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OUT+ABOUT

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Promoting Travel and Tourism by Coach



Good times?

Speaking to a few operators last week it's clear that there may be a rising tide of bookings heading the coach operators' way.

Not quite a flood. And certainly not a torrent. But perhaps enough to raise a few smiles around the industry.

My own experience at the recent Destinations show would certainly indicate that there is a buzz around the industry. Clearly this is not scientific or statistically robust, but talking to stand holders at the Alexandra Palace show was hard work because they were just so busy! Of course, it's impossible to have any real insight into whether that interest translates into to bums on coach seats, but it surely points in the right direction. Certainly one operator I spoke to recently thinks that the worm may have turned with regard to the budget airlines. Not just the raised taxes - although I think more and more people are starting to baulk at the actual final total on their credit card bill after they book a supposed £19.99 'cheap' fare - but the months of bad publicity for the airline industry. The queues at Heathrow last summer, the recent shenanigans with the weather before Christmas and the ever-present security concerns, must all eat away at people's perceptions of air travel. Sure, not for all journeys, but for many where coaches (and trains for that matter) are a real viable

alternative. The industry has always known that it has a great product to market, but sometimes it has been steamrollered by the big airlines' marketing budgets into becoming something of a forgotten industry.

There are many in coach tourism who seem worried about 'exploiting' other people's problems. That in some way it's unfair to kick the airlines when they're down. With another BA cabin crew strike looming, I personally wouldn't worry about it! They'd do the same to you and in any case the industry's not exactly doing a Watergate.

It's simply benefiting from a realignment of reality: a cheap fare's not really cheap when it triples in cost with taxes... an hour-long security queue and a virtual strip-search is not a great way to start a holiday... paying extra for your bags is a rip-off... seats that don't recline on a three-hour flight are uncomfortable... inedible airline food remains inedible... a two-hour wait to check in so that the airline doesn't have to employ more check-in staff is a pain!

Fight back, guys. Market the true benefits. Shout them from the highest tower. There may be some fertile ground out there.



Andy Sutcliffe
Editorial Director

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Grand setting: Blenheim Palace state rooms

New tours at Blenheim

Meet the mighty who walked palace corridors

Blenheim in Oxfordshire is launching a new series of themed talks and tours for groups in February and March. The tours and talks will concentrate on the personalities who have been connected with the magnificent palace down the ages.

Over the last 300 years, the famous and infamous have visited and lived in the masterpiece of English baroque architecture that is Blenheim. From the imposing vastness of the Great Hall to the intricate detailing of the state rooms, the palace interiors beautifully balance the delicate with the awe-inspiring.

Each day begins at 10.30am with coffee and biscuits in the Indian Room. The talks begin at 11am followed by the tour taken by the specialist for that particular theme. Visitors can then spend the rest of the day in the palace

or in the grounds.

There are four themes on offer: Churchill – the Untold Story, The Ladies of Blenheim, The House the John Built and The Portraits of Blenheim. There are 25 places available on each tour and each must be pre-booked and pre-paid. Prices include full day entry to the palace and gardens with morning refreshments.

Tours can be booked on dates to suit and cost £13.95 per adult and £11.50 for concessions. Contact the group co-ordinator on 01993 811091 to book or log on to www.blenheimpalace.com for detailed information about the tours.

TOUR DATES:

The Unknown Winston: Feb 28, March 14
The Ladies of Blenheim: Feb 22, March 21
The House that John Built: March 16
The Portraits at Blenheim: March 7

British spending on day trips

Recent VisitBritain figures suggest spending on day trips is on the up, with more than 870 million trips in 2005 producing £37.4bn. On average each trip lasted five hours, the equivalent of half a million people taking a year out to tour England.

VisitBritain chief executive, Tom Wright, said: "The new survey shows that day trips are going from strength to strength despite the challenges of 2005 and reflect the changing nature of tourism as city breaks continue to rise in popularity."

Other results showed that a quarter of leisure trips are for tourism purposes (up from 16% in 2003) and that inland town and city destinations are most popular with 77% of trips visiting urban areas, compared to 16% in the countryside, 5% to the seaside and 2% to the coast.

Jousting returns to Carew Castle

To mark the 500th anniversary of the last great jousting tournament in Wales, Carew Castle, Pembrokeshire, will be recreating the spectacular five-day event in all its medieval splendour between May 2 and 7.

In 1507, Carew Castle welcomed a host of knights and their retinues to honour Sir Rhys ap Thomas and to celebrate his admission into the Order of the Garter. The five days of celebrations included hunting with hawk and hound, feasting, music and dancing and a day-long ride across to Lamphey Palace for mass by the Bishop of St

Dauids. The highlight was the grand jousting tournament between the Knights of Sir Griffiths ap Rhys and Sir William Herbert.

For five days in May the fields around the 1,000-year-old castle will once again echo to the clash of lance on shield as the tournament is re-enacted. Events will include early music concerts, storytelling and craftmaking demonstrations; on Saturday May 5 there will be a horse cavalcade to Lamphey and a concert featuring the Mediaeval Baebes. The jousting will take place on Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday, May 6 and 7.



London's Southbank Centre is a magnet for culture vultures

DEALS OF THE WEEK

■ **The Best Western Leicester Stage hotel** offers a modern venue in a quiet suburb of Leicester and is able to cater for large groups. Facilities include a bar and restaurant, health and leisure club and free parking. Group rates are available from as little as £28, based on two people sharing. The hotel has a capacity of 140 guests and booking is needed.

■ **Barrow-in-Furness Council's group incentive scheme** has lots to offer coach parties, including free meals for drivers, free entry and parking and special accommodation packages. Abbey House Hotel, Fairways

Hotel and Victoria Park Hotel are all part of the scheme. Discount vouchers for a host of attractions can also be obtained from Barrow's tourist information centre, which can be contacted on 01229 894784.

■ **Overlooking the Thames** with views of the Houses of Parliament, Big Ben and St Paul's, the Southbank Centre comprises of three world-renowned venues where special deals are offered to coach parties at certain concerts. Group organisers are invited to join the group booking scheme, offering early reservations of the best seats, often at discounted rates. Free coach parking is available roadside. Call 0870 1656000 for more details.



Jousting: back after 500 years at Carew Castle

Set in a stunning location midway between Tenby and Pembroke, Carew Castle overlooks a 23-acre millpond. The site incorporates an impressive 11th Century Celtic cross, the only restored tidal mill in Wales, a medieval bridge and a picnic area all linked by a delightful mile-long circular walk. It's open to the public daily

from 10am until 5pm, April to October.

Visitors should email info@carew500.com for information on advance ticket sales. Tickets for the Mediaeval Baebes concert cost £12 and other concerts cost £6 and £7.50.

The arena events, including entry to Carew Castle, jousting and hunting games, will be

staged between 11-5pm and cost £8 for adults; £4 for children; under-fives are free.

Those planning to stay overnight will find accommodation suggestions in the Pembrokeshire Holiday Guide, call 08705 103103 for a free copy or visit www.visitpembrokeshire.com.

HOLIDAY POUND

£1 will get you:

Euro	1.46
Switzerland (Franc)	2.36
Norway (Kroner)	12.14
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Poland (Zloty)	5.51

DIESEL PRICES

Cost per litre in pence:

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Sweden	76.06
Germany	72.88
Switzerland	71.28
Ireland	70.69
Belgium	70.28
Czech Republic	69.81
France	69.05
Portugal	68.85
Hungary	68.21
Netherlands	68.10
Austria	66.59
Spain	66.25
Poland	63.87
Luxembourg	57.85



Taking in the sights of London on a Duck Tour

New London Duck Tour

A new duck tour has been launched featuring secrets of James Bond's London with interesting facts about Ian Fleming who created Bond and some of the workings of MI5.

Up to 30 people can be accommodated in the vehicle and this includes the services of a guide and public address commentary. There is even a Bond quiz with a champagne prize.

During the tour, visitors can enjoy food and a welcome drink - a martini cocktail (shaken, not stirred, of course), a glass of champagne or a soft drink. As this is a joint venture with Planet Hollywood, the refreshments will

be taken there in the James Bond Room. London Duck Tours offers tailored pick-ups from locations in central London or the City and tours last 90 minutes.

Individual tickets cost £17.50 for adults, £12 for children up to 12 years old, £14 concessions (OAPs and students) and £53 for a family ticket (two adults, two children). A 10% discount applies for groups of more than ten. Corporate hire of a vessel starts at £525 for an adult-majority party, £420 for a concessions-majority party and £350 for majority children. Call 020 7928 3132 or visit the website www.londonducktours.co.uk.

Briefly

Rail operators have reported a dramatic rise in passengers after a bad year for airports. Eurostar saw an 11% increase in sales, with the biggest increase coming from business passengers. A company statement said: "Increased security at airports since the summer and foggy weather in the UK at Christmas meant that thousands of passengers switched from airlines."

Seventeen million people will book at least part of their 2007 holiday online and 13 million will use the net to find a short break, according to the Holiday Planning Report. Despite these figures, however, just 1% will use the internet for coach tickets.

The Yorkshire Dales annual newspaper for visitors is due to be released in the next week. The paper contains features on wildlife, things to do and also useful information on car and coach parks, toilets, maps and attractions. The paper can be obtained from National Park and Tourist Information Centres in and around Yorkshire.

Welcome Break has announced a new contract to operate the catering at Eurotunnel's passenger terminal building at Folkestone. A bigger seating area, Coffee Primo, Burger King and Eat In will be added by the spring. Four million passengers visit the terminal building every year.

Investors are said to be increasingly looking at investing in Bulgaria as the country gears up for an influx of tourists in 2007. Most new developers have opted to build spa centres in Velingrad, Sandanski and Hisar - all areas rich in therapeutic mineral waters. More than 25 transactions for investments in hotels and apartments were registered in the last quarter of 2006 from Greek, Ukrainian, Russian and Scandinavian companies.



Carton House: glorious architecture and surroundings, just 30 minutes from Dublin

Business and pleasure at Carton House

It's hard to imagine a more perfect venue than Carton House Business Hotel for both social and corporate occasions. The unique surroundings, impressive architecture, gracious service and state of the art audiovisual technology provide the ideal setting for large-scale meetings as well as intimate seminars and workshops. The combination of modern meeting rooms and attentive management staff makes the hotel an ideal conference facility in Ireland. Facilities include a dedicated team trained in every aspect of meeting and conference organisation, the latest audio-video technology, a room layout to suit particular meeting or conference requirements, flexible coffee and lunch breaks, natural daylight rooms with air-conditioning, and WiFi.

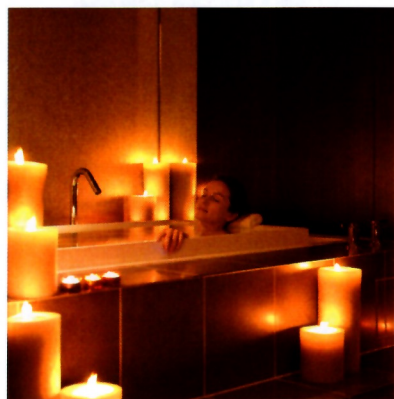
Coupled with the golfing facilities at Carton, there is so much more to discover and enjoy. For those who are looking for something more physically demanding, there are numerous outdoor activities to experience including guided walks, fishing, nature trails and other outdoor activities.

Carton also has a spa with all treatments tailored to meet guests' specific requirements. The spa is a Molton Brown Spa and embodies a wide range of treatments that follow the seasons: renew (Spring), radiance (Summer), replenish (Autumn) and regenerate (Winter). Each is an odyssey designed to give the tonic needed to fully relax and revitalise.

From the moment you arrive at Carton, you'll understand exactly why the 19th Earl of Kildare chose this spectacular location for the Fitzgerald family's country seat. Built in 1739 and designed by the famed architect Richard Castles, the magnificent silhouette of

Carton House overlooks one of Ireland's most impressive country estates. Located just 30 minutes from Dublin city centre, there can be few venues in Ireland a group will enjoy as much as Carton House.

Contact general manager James Tynan on +353 (0)1 5052000 to discuss bringing a group to Carton.



Relaxing in Carton's Molton Brown Spa

Need help planning a group night out?

Hospitality Line is the UK's biggest organiser of group meals, attractions and travel packages. With an extensive portfolio of clients, Hospitality Line is able to meet operators' needs through its restaurant cheques, London pub passports, attraction tickets and easy internet booking system, all without charging a premium rate.

On Hospitality Line's website is a host of packages including river cruises, sightseeing tours, theatre

trips, nights out and corporate events. A new service for 2007 is the Pride of London Entertainment Night, an exclusive package for a traditional London sing-along evening. The night includes food, drink, singing and dancing, every Saturday starting in March. The programme has a 7.30 arrival for drinks and reception – one glass of wine, a pint of beer or a soft drink. At 8pm dinner is served and this is a traditional three-course pub meal. After dinner there is traditional entertainment and dancing with a 10.30 to 11pm finish.

■ Hospitality Line's services can be seen on the website www.hospitalityline.co.uk or to contact the organiser call 020 82899595.

Warm winter hits Europe's ski resorts

At many ski resorts across Europe there is still more mud than snow, following record-breaking temperatures in December and January. World Cup race courses have been moved and recorded messages on hotlines are warning of poor conditions. "With the current warm climate it's very clear that things have become completely crazy," says the Meteo France national weather service recording. "We're in winter and the temperature in the valleys is equivalent of the end of March."

But while many of the Alps' 80 million annual tourists have been left paying more to get to higher ground, across the Atlantic, Canada is reporting record snow levels in the Rockies. However, snow is falling too fast and temperatures are too cold, at minus-20, for comfortable skiing. With Europe's temperature's set to drop over the weekend and America's freeze set to thaw, the Alps skiing season may finally be able to get into full swing soon.

Newcastle's Homemaker Exhibition

With interest and spending on homes and interiors at an all-time high, businesses in the north-east are preparing for the Homemaker Exhibition in April. The show will bring together thousands of high-earning, style-conscious visitors from across the region under one roof.

Events manager, Joanne Fenwick, said: "There will be more than 80 stalls with information and ideas

on just about everything related to property. This will be an exciting and informative exhibition and will appeal to everyone whether they're buying or renting, singles, couples or families."

Visitors can expect an action-packed two-day event with everything from celebrity cooking demonstrations with chef Paul Rankin, prize draws, competitions, property advice and



Celebrity chef Paul Rankin will be cooking up a feast for visitors

ideas and even hot air balloon rides.

Advance tickets are now on sale through www.ticketmaster.co.uk costing £5 for adults, £2.50 for concessions and £8 for a family ticket for two adults and two children. Children under 16 are admitted free of charge.

■ For more information call Julie Moorhouse on 0191 201 6119 or e-mail her at julie.moorhouse@ncjmedia.co.uk

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Held annually, over two days at the NEC Birmingham in March, British Travel Trade Fair is the centre-piece of British Tourism Week organised by Reed Travel Exhibitions, global leaders in travel trade exhibitions on behalf of VisitBritain in conjunction with VisitScotland, Visit Wales and Tourism Ireland.

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Briefly

■ Nine out of ten hoteliers say the imposition of a bed tax will damage the UK tourist trade, according to accountant UHY Hacker Young. The firm spoke to financial directors on the boards of 17 hotel groups, who said a tax will simply reinforce the perception of the UK as a high-cost destination for overseas visitors. A quarter of respondents, including Hilton and InterContinental, also said it will affect their future expansion plans.

■ Bolton is looking to shed its image and become a welcoming tourist town. Officials from the Lancashire town have visited Bolton's twin town Paderborn in Germany and believe the friendly northern people of Bolton can act as an advert for the town. Bolton's head of tourism said: "We always hear from people how friendly people in Bolton are. It's recognised everywhere."

■ Mediterranean cruise specialist, Costa Cruises, will inaugurate its new vessel, the Costa Serena, in Marseille in May. The 3,780-guest Serena will be the twelfth member of Costa's growing fleet. The operator has a long tradition with France and anticipates to collect 14% of its guests from there this year.

■ Disney shocked business owners in Florida by pulling thousands of its brochures from hotels and restaurants, saying they do little to attract visitors. Tourism executives say their guests have been inconvenienced by the absence of information about Florida's most popular tourist destination. "We made a business decision," said Disney's vice-president of public affairs. "Our research indicated that brochures were not the reason for people to come to Disney."



Blooming marvellous: Harrogate Spring Flower Show

Harrogate Spring Flower Show

Tickets are now on sale for the event widely regarded by many as the start of the UK's gardening show season. The flower halls at the Great Yorkshire Showground, Harrogate will be home to over 100 of the country's leading horticultural nurseries, all exhibiting and competing for Best in Show and the North of England Horticultural Society (NEHS) Trophy.

A huge range of gardening accessories will be on sale, including summer houses, statues, ceramic pots, gardening tools and more. Much of the showground is hard-surfaced and over 70% of the show is under cover, either in fully ramped and floored marquees or in the two permanent exhibition halls.

The floristry and flower arrangement marquee is one of the premier independent venues in the UK, with 14 flower arrangement and four floristry classes, as well as many college and non-competitive major exhibits from invited National Association of Flower Arranging Societies

(NAFAS) areas.

The spectacular 18,000 sq ft ruche-lined marquee provides a wonderful backdrop for flower arrangers and florists from all over the UK to show off their skills. With 60,000 visitors expected over the four days, Harrogate Spring Flower Show promises to be a great occasion for gardeners, families and groups looking for a day out in Yorkshire.

SHOW TIMES: April 26-29, 9.30am to 5.30pm.

PRICES: Thursday April 26: £14 (Pre-booked £12)

Friday April 27: £13 (Pre-booked £11)

Saturday April 28: £13 (Pre-booked £11)

Sunday April 29: £12 (Pre-booked £10)

Sunday after 14.00hrs: £6 at the gate

■ Tickets for NAFAS demonstrations (Thurs/Fri/Sat at 11.30am and 2pm; Sun 11.30am) can be bought from the NAFAS Publications stand in the marquee for £1 each.

■ Under-16s are free of charge, if accompanied by an adult. Pre-booked tickets will be available on a sale-or-return basis.

More criticism over air passenger duty

The Scottish Passengers Agents' Association (SPAA) has hit out at new rules over air passenger duty, claiming passengers north of the border will bear the brunt of the charge. The SPAA said passengers leaving the UK will only pay the increased charge once, but a Scottish customer will be forced to pay three times if the journey involves a transfer in London – once from Scotland to London, again on the outbound

trip and yet again on the return flight.

SPAA president, Sandy McPherson, said: "Once again Scottish travellers will be penalised more than their counterparts in the south. For families travelling on holiday from Scotland, this represents a huge increase in costs. Many tour operators who were already planning offsetting have now abandoned such schemes as

the overall cost will not be sustainable."

Meanwhile, the Isle of Man's decision to follow in the footsteps of the UK by doubling charges has not gone down well. Travel Services Isle of Man MD, Peter Drew, said: "The key air routes for this island (Manchester and Liverpool) are very short, only around 70 miles, but the same tax is being applied to flights into Cyprus – it's nonsense."

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These rates are confidential to your company and must be packaged at all times.

† £2 supplement per ticket on fireworks dates, 20th, 21st, 26th - 28th October & 3rd November 2007.

* Gate prices correct at time of going to press and are subject to change.

All information in this leaflet is correct at the time of going to press, but may be subject to change.

For further information or reservations contact Sales Support on:

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LOOKOUT FOR OUR SPECIAL EVENTS DATES FOR 2007

A fair fare or a taxing issue?

The Chancellor's doubling of Airline Passenger Duty has more to do with opportunist money-grabbing than environmental issues, says Stephen Rodgers



Presumably everyone's advertising for 2007 holidays now carries the strapline 'Save £20 on every departure'. To qualify, customers simply have to travel on a coach instead of an aeroplane, thus avoiding the need to pay increased Airline Passenger Duty.

Right now there are advantages in being a coach tour operator rather than an air package operator and the Chancellor's pre-Budget announcement to double APD has sent tour operators into a spin.

The cynics are saying this is just a money-grabbing exercise to plug a black hole in the finances - and they are right. The speed of the decision, lack of lead-in time and refusal to even acknowledge travel industry lobbying all point to one thing - an easy target.

Smokers will recognise the scenario. Just as tobacco duty does not directly address the problems caused by smoking, slapping an extra £40 tax on an airline ticket will not contribute to tackling environmental problems.

Of course, Gordon Brown did not invent APD - that was one of Kenneth Clarke's first stealth taxes of the early 1990s and the growing propensity for leisure travel has had the Treasury tills ringing ever since.

It's not just the British government which has recognised the potential for taxing tourism. The Alaska state government has just voted for a whopping great arrival tax on cruise passengers to compensate for the "environmental impact and strain on the infrastructure". Alaska's tourist industry is almost 100% dependent on cruise ships, so what kind of message is its government actually trying to send out?

Fortunately, coach operators don't face these problems and increases in the Venice toll or parking charges at the Cliffs of Moher can at least be spread over 40 or 50 passengers. Tour



Stephen Rodgers

operators faced with the most recent government tax increases must absorb the first 2% before passing on any costs to the customer.

Draconian though the measures may be, the increased cost doesn't come anywhere near 2% of the cost of a cruise to Alaska. The only place it can come from is the operator's bottom line.

The situation is different for airlines which simply sell travel from A to B. They can pass on any tax rises by adding to the long list of extra charges which follow the price shown on the ticket. (Departure tax, passenger service charge, credit card charge, baggage check-in charge, etc). My wife and I are going to a wedding in Brussels this summer. By booking early we got a really good deal for the weekend (just £28 return each). Guess how much was finally debited from my card? £220! I hope the newlyweds aren't expecting a present!

Seen the light?

My recent comments on the state of local transport provision in Bristol and

Bath have not been born from any bad experience personally, more a reflection of what has been going on in the local press. The evening newspaper has had its claws into the bus company for some time, and almost weekly the letters page is given over to rants from disgruntled passengers. Regional TV, meanwhile, has gone after the rail operations since the new timetable introduction, even to the point of tracking down rolling stock that has been taken out of service and lying idle in sidings.

This week, long-suffering commuters received good news of a service review and additional carriages on local trains, while the marketing department has obviously been taking good advice as well.

A leaflet dropped on my doormat the other day promoting 'Trains Every Hour from Keynsham'. Perhaps it's going to be a good year after all...



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Dave Smith with his monthly round-up of what's new at the ferry companies and ports

Fears grow over future of P&O's Portsmouth to Bilbao ferry service

Concerns are growing for the future of P&O Ferries' Portsmouth-Bilbao route. The vessel *Pride of Bilbao*, which operates the route, is on charter from owners Irish Continental Group and the charter runs out in October this year. The company has to make its intentions clear within two to three weeks on whether it will retain the vessel.

Industry observers believe that the decision is touch and go as to whether P&O renews the charter, looks for another vessel or closes the route altogether. Although the company won't release passenger numbers or the amount of money it makes on the route, it is understood that it makes a small profit. The company made hundreds of staff redundant in 2004 when it announced the findings of a review into its loss-making Western Channel routes. They pulled out of their routes from Portsmouth to France, but the Bilbao route survived.

Last year, P&O was taken over by DP World for more than £3bn, which has publicly stated that ferries were part of its future plans.



Will it stay or will it go? P&O's *Pride of Bilbao* – future in doubt

Dave Smith is one of the best-known faces in coach tourism, having worked at Townsend Thoresen, Olau Line, Sealink, as general manager of Westbus, at Hoverspeed and Port of Dover. In at the start of the Coach Tourism Council, he latterly worked as its administrator.



Artist's impression of the new *Armorique*

Brittany Ferries unveils £81 million *Armorique* luxury vessel

Brittany Ferries new £81 million cruise-ferry, on order from the Aker shipyard in Helsinki, is to be called the *Armorique* after the national park of outstanding natural beauty in western Brittany.

Due to come into service in the autumn of 2008, the new vessel will be used solely on the Plymouth-Roscoff route, replacing *Pont L'Abbé*, currently on short-term charter.

Armorique will be

167 metres long and 26.8 metres wide, with a cruising speed of 23 knots. She will have 250 cabins and can accommodate 1,500 passengers, 470 cars, coaches and 65 lorries.

This is not the first ferry in the Brittany Ferries fleet to bear the name: the previous *Armorique* operated from 1975 to 1992.

Says UK and Ireland managing director, David Longden: "*Armorique* is being

designed specifically for the Plymouth-Roscoff route and will provide new levels of comfort for our passengers. It is part of our ongoing plan to become not only the most modern, but the most comfortable fleet on the channel."

And, in a separate statement, Brittany Ferries announced that long-serving UK head David Longden has been promoted to the main board of the ferry company.

Company spokesman Brian Rees said: "We are now finalising the detail of our plans for the Bilbao service and we will be in a position to bring staff up to speed in the next week."

Changes planned for Northern Isles ferry service

Company managers of Northern Isles ferry operator Northlink have given assurances that changes they plan to make to the manning levels on their three ferries will not result in a reduction of service. Speaking recently to Shetland industry representatives and the local authority they outlined the company's plans for the next few years.

They explained that they were looking into a number of ways to re-organise manning patterns on board the vessels, which could result in some of the duties being transferred from crew to land-based staff. There was also an ongoing re-allocation of jobs, which would see the closure of the *à la carte* restaurant during winter months and the service moved to a dedicated corner in the main restaurant. Assurances were given that the onboard reorganisation and reduction

in crew would free up much-needed additional cabins. Northlink is also finalising plans to build further cabin space during the spring.

The Shetland Isles have become a featured destination for coach operators operating tours to Northern Scotland and Northlink Ferries are the preferred operator by many.

The end for Swansea Cork Ferries?

Swansea Cork Ferries, which has carried 3.5 million passengers across the Irish Sea since it started in 1987, has cancelled its 2007 sailings.

The company stated recently that it was unable to find a suitable replacement for the vessel *MV Superferry*, which operated the service last year, and therefore there would be no service in 2007. They will be laying off 30 staff but they hoped to resume sailings in 2008.

The Swansea Cork Ferry service, which ran between March and October, has ploughed millions into the economies of Swansea Bay and Cork and Kerry, and was popular with tourists. However, the company has been hampered by a one-ship sailing schedule that did not always suit group operators.

LD Lines win bid for Transmanche Ferries

Bids have been accepted from a number of sources to operate the Transmanche Ferries service between Newhaven and Dieppe, on behalf of the public body Conseil General de Seine Maritime.

Western Channel newcomers LD Lines, who started a service from Portsmouth to Le Havre in October 2005, are the successful bidders for this loss-making route.

They take over from April 1, with a subsidy from the French Department of up to €14.6 million per year.

It is understood that they plan two round trips a day in winter, increasing to three a day in the summer season. Some sailings between Newhaven and Le Havre are a possibility.

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ACCELERATE TO FRANCE IN 35 MINUTES

Palace view

This year's Destinations tourism show kick-started the year in fine style with attendance and exhibitors up. *CBW* reports from Alexandra Palace...

Group travel organisers were out in force for the Destinations 2007 exhibition last week. Almost 1,000 organisers made their way to north London's Alexandra Palace for the free entry show organised by Tourism South East and *Group Travel Organiser* magazine, supported by Visit London and the East of England Tourist Board.

The number of exhibitors was over 200 with destinations, attractions, hotels, transport providers and tour operators taking stands. Just under 20 were new exhibitors keen to inform group travel organisers about their latest developments; these included the River Thames Alliance, Cornwall's Eden Project and the English National Ballet.

There was an excellent take-up for free places on the coach services offered to visitors from outside London by members of the CPT's CoachMarque quality scheme. Seven coaches with onboard Blue Badge guides departed from 20 major towns, plus six central London mainline railway stations. In addition, Anderson Travel operated a free shuttle service from Alexandra Palace and Wood Green stations to the exhibition venue.

Among those taking space for the first time were Marriott Hotels. According to Sarah Goldsbrough: "We have been constantly busy, it's not quietened down all day and we are very confident of receiving a good level of bookings after the show". Also exhibiting for the first time, Bob Ginn from The Cruise Specialists said: "We didn't stop for a moment until just before the show closed, with excellent enquiries from some big groups".

Sandra French, sales manager at Blenheim Palace, said that exactly the right people had visited their stand and Karen Crick, from the RAF Museum, Cosford, was delighted by the very steady interest in its new National Cold War Exhibition from both new contacts and those who had visited the region previously.

Regular exhibitor Gemma Elliott, from the Royal Collection, said they must book earlier next year to guarantee a corner stand, while Robert Opie from the Museum of Brands, Packaging and Advertising summed up Excursions 2007 in just one word: "Brilliant!"

Organisers said that the 2007 show was a complete success. Exhibitors had increased, the high level of visitors was maintained and the quality of buyers improved.

Delighted with the positive feedback from both visitors and exhibitors alike, the organisers have re-booked the same venue for next year's exhibition on Saturday, January 12, 2008. Special early bookers' rates are now on offer to this year's exhibitors booking a stand for the 2008 show before March 23. For details, contact Fran Downton at Tourism South East on email fdownton@tourismse.com, telephone 023 8062 5409.



HIGHLIGHTS

Beaulieu and Buckler's Hard

New 'supercars' exhibition from Easter.

■ Contact: Matthew Lawrence.

Tel: 01590 612345.

www.beaulieu.co.uk

Blackpool Pleasure Beach

'Infusion', a thrilling whiteknuckle ride with cascading walls of water and five loops and rolls, opens in the spring while the world premiere of 'Forbidden' takes place on July 6, a new concept in entertainment.

■ Tel: 01253 336638.

www.blackpoolpleasurebeach.com

Blenheim Palace

A new visitor experience, Blenheim Palace - The Untold Story, will open from May. During the last 300 years Blenheim has played host to many inspirational people and countless dramatic events of national and international significance. Located in a suite of first floor rooms, never before open to the public, this state of the art attraction brings these events vividly to life with interactive displays.

■ Tel: 01993 810534.

www.blenheimpalace.com

Colchester: Group Days Out

Opening early 2008 is Firstsite, a

contemporary new £16.5 million visual arts and cultural centre in the town centre designed by New York architect Rafael Vinoly, with film screening facilities, galleries, places to eat, drink and shop and conference and creative spaces. The landmark building will have surrounding parkland and views of the Roman wall.

■ Tel: 01206 282915. www.colchester.gov.uk. www.firstsite.uk.net

Compton Verney Art Gallery

Compton Verney, Warwickshire's fine art gallery housed in a Grade I listed Robert Adam mansion, has a new programme starting with *Opulence and Anxiety* (March 24 - June 10), which charts a path through the history of British landscape painting from the 18th century to the present day with works by Constable, Gainsborough, Turner and others.

■ Tel: 01926 645500.

www.comptonverney.org.uk

Destination Bristol

From February until the end of 2008, Destination Bristol will be hosting 'Breaking the Chains', a groundbreaking exhibition to mark 200 years since the abolition of slavery at the British Empire and Commonwealth Museum. Bold displays will explore the lives of those involved in the



Top: North London's Alexandra Palace was once again the location for the Destinations group travel show. Above: The central area was packed all day... maybe because of the free tea! Left: Mrs de Rothschild explains the joys of Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway

transatlantic slave trade and the abolitionist movement.

■ Tel: 0117 946 2205.
www.visitbristol.co.uk

English Heritage

The Battle of Hastings, arguably the most pivotal conflict in England's history, will be interpreted in a new £2.3million visitor centre opening early February by English Heritage.

■ Tel: 01483 252000.
www.english-heritage.org.uk

English National Ballet

English National Ballet will be taking four productions on the road for its spring 2007 tour returning to London's Royal Albert Hall in June to perform the classic production of Derek Deane's Swan Lake.

■ Tel: 020 7581 1245.
www.ballet.org.uk

Exbury Gardens and Steam Railway

New Maize Maze opening in the summer and special week of evening opening May 14-18.

■ Tel: 023 8089 1203.
www.exbury.co.uk

Greenwich Maritime

The new £15 million Time & Space redevelopment of the Royal Observatory opens in May with a spectacular 120-seater Peter Harrison Planetarium, four new space galleries and the Lloyds education centre. The National Maritime Museum will also host several new exhibitions this year such as Sailor Chic from July to November which looks at the naval uniform's influence on modern fashion.

■ Tel: 020 8312 6603.
www.greenwichwhs.org.uk

Grim's Dyke Hotel: Gilbert & Sullivan/Victorian Gardens

Known for its Gilbert & Sullivan opera/dinner evenings, the Grim's Dyke Hotel, Harrow, will be hosting a new rose weekend in June and Call my Wine Bluff evenings when guests are asked to guess which so called 'wine experts' are telling the truth at a wine tasting/dinner.

■ Tel: 020 8385 3103.
www.grimsdyke.com

Hatfield House

New summer Rose Weekend June 16-17 with talks, demonstrations, rose trails, plant sales, rose-themed foods

and gifts.

■ Tel: 01707 287010.
www.hatfield-house.co.uk

Huntingdonshire Tourism

Huntingdonshire will have a new nine-day food festival from September 8 - 16, with various foodie events from farm visits and cookery demonstrations to food trails and competitions.

■ Tel: 01480 388251.
www.huntingdonshire.gov.uk

London's Transport Museum

Re-opening in the autumn after £20m re-build and re-display with new facilities - 121-seat Cubic Theatre, Viacom Outdoor Art Gallery, two-store shop and café-bar.

■ Contact: Dawn Ross. Tel: 020 7565 7265. www.ltmuseum.co.uk

New London Partnership

Showcased new attractions opening between now and 2012 Olympic Games including O2, a world-class entertainment destination on the site of the former Millennium Dome, opens in July.

■ Tel: 020 7345 5144.
www.visiteastlondon.co.uk

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard

Portsmouth Historic Dockyard will be highlighting the abolition of slavery bicentenary with a special exhibition opening on February 10, 'Chasing Freedom: The Royal Navy and the Suppression of the Atlantic Slave Trade'.

■ Contact: Bill Sainsbury. Tel: 023 9289 4554. www.historicdockyard.co.uk

Portsmouth - the Waterfront City

Portsmouth offers life on the water's edge with centuries of history. This year, Portsmouth's Royal Naval Museum will be commemorating the 25th anniversary of the Falklands campaign.

■ Tel: 023 9238 4116.
www.visitportsmouth.co.uk

Royal Academy of Arts

For groups with an interest in fine art the London Royal Academy of Arts will have details of its new exhibitions planned for 2007 which include the Unknown Moet: Pastels and Drawing (17 March to 10 June).

■ Tel: 020 7300 5729.
www.royalacademy.org.uk >

DESTINATIONS 2007

Royal Air Force Museum

The Royal Air Force Museum at Cosford, Shropshire, will be opening a new National Cold War Exhibition in February 2007. Housed in a highly innovative, contemporary building, it will reveal the tensions that tormented the great super powers for a major part of the 20th century, telling the story of the Cold War from national, international and social/political as well as cultural perspectives. A major feature of the exhibition will be Britain's three V-bombers - Vulcan, Victor and Valiant - as well as aircraft suspended in flying attitudes including the Dakota, Canberra, Meteor and Lightning.

■ Tel: 020 8358 4814.

www.rafmuseum.org

River Thames

River Thames Alliance has three new itineraries for days out to be launched next March and 12 fully accessible riverside paths.

■ Contact: Sarah Fleming.

Tel: 0118 953 5771.

www.visitthames.co.uk

Royal Marines Museum

The 25th anniversary of the Falklands campaign will be remembered by the Royal Marines Museum, Southsea, Hampshire with their Land, Sea and Air exhibition.

■ Tel: 023 9281 9385.

www.royalmarinesmuseum.co.uk

Savill Garden: Crown Estate

The 35-acre woodland garden within Windsor Great Park boasts an iconic new visitor centre, the Savill Building, with a unique grid shell roof made from sustainably-sourced larch and green oak harvested from forests commercially managed by the Crown Estate's Windsor Great Park forestry department.

■ Tel: 01753 847537.

www.theroyallandscape.co.uk

Shropshire's Star Attractions

Shropshire's five star attractions, namely Royal Air Force Museum Cosford, Severn Valley Railway, Ironbridge Gorge Museums, Weston Park and Hoo Farm are featured on a new website, www.shropshireforgroups.co.uk, which highlights what they can



Scenes from the show (clockwise from above): Group Line were celebrating 15 years in theatre ticketing. Popular group destination Grim's Dyke Hotel, former home of Sir William Gilbert. Somerset House, home of the Gilbert Collection. Attracting business to the 2008 Motor Show.

offer visitors ranging from leisure outings to educational tours.

■ Tel: 01952 567561.

www.visitironbridge.co.uk,

www.shropshireforgroups.co.uk

Simply Groups

Simply Groups specialises in putting together tailor-made tours with individual itineraries for private groups, clubs and associations as well as schools and universities to UK, European and world wide destinations. Familiarisation trips for group organisers.

■ Tel: 01943 605999.

www.simplygroups.co.uk

Somerset House

Thames-side Somerset House has several new exhibitions for 2007 including France to Russia, which will showcase the Empress Josephine's Malmaison Collection from May to September.

■ Tel: 020 7420 9410.

www.somerset-house.org.uk

Suffolk Tourism

During 2007, Suffolk will be celebrating its links with the founding of the first permanent settlement in

Jamestown, USA, 400 years ago by Captain Bartholomew Gosnold. The adventurer led a maritime expedition from England to explore the Americas in 1606/07, some 13 years before the Pilgrim Fathers arrived in the Mayflower.

A new booklet, On the Gosnold Trail, highlights Suffolk locations linked to Captain Gosnold open to visitors.

■ Tel: 01437 694416.

www.choosesuffolk.com

Windsor and the Royal Borough

Legoland Windsor will be opening its new Land of the Vikings with two spectacular new rides, the Viking River Splash and the Longboat Invader. Opens March 17.

■ Tel: 01753 743918.

www.windsor.gov.uk,

www.legoland.co.uk

Zoological Society of London

Two new multi-million pound exhibits are opening around Easter at London Zoo, namely Gorilla Kingdom and Rainforest Lookout.

■ Tel: 020 7449 6275.

www.zsl.org



Promoting Travel and Tourism by Coach

CTC at BTTF with CBW

Britain's biggest business-to-business event for the domestic and inbound tourism industry, BTTF 2007, is organised on behalf of VisitBritain by CTC member Reed Travel Exhibitions and this year takes place from March 13-14 at NEC Birmingham.

Coach & Bus Week has kindly agreed for the CTC to share its stand at the exhibition. Although we will not have an 'advertising' presence, chief executive Chris Wales will be delighted to meet members there. Chris will also be a judge of the competition for the Best Stand at this key trade fair, which is the centrepiece of the new British Tourism Week (March 12-18).

AnnMarie Meaney, Reed Travel event manager for the exhibition, said: "Quality is going to be the keynote of BTTF 2007, and we are actively encouraging our exhibitors to showcase the 'best of the best' and promote the sheer unrivalled quality of our tourism product."

More than 400 exhibitors will be showcasing the very latest products and services at the Fair and around 2,500 travel and tourism professionals are expected to attend.



Snowdon Mountain Railway: One of latest CTC members

More new members join up

The CTC welcomes two new members from Wales. The award-winning Wales Millennium Centre, Cardiff Bay, is one of Europe's most innovative and vibrant performing arts venues. It provides a world-class stage for ballet, opera,

dance and musicals, along with free daily foyer performances and behind the scenes tours. Alternatively, enjoy breathtaking views of North Wales and, on fine days, see as far away as the Isle of Man and the Wicklow Mountains in Ireland

on a journey on the Snowdon Mountain Railway. Passengers travel through an awe-inspiring landscape on one of the great little trains of Wales as it climbs to Clogwyn Station, three-quarters of the way up Wales' highest mountain.

16 to 18. One of the major industry events in 2007, it provides an ideal opportunity for coach operators and suppliers to hear about travel trends and issues facing the industry, while also having time to network and socialise.

A gala dinner and disco on the first night will be sponsored by Hilton Hotels, with Towergate Chapman Stevens sponsoring a more informal networking evening with activities on Saturday night.

Saturday morning offers the chance to discuss business at the popular Conference Suppliers and Operators Workshop and this will be followed by a choice of familiarisation trips.

This event should not be missed. If you have yet to book please contact conference organiser Karen Hudson at KarenH@cpt-uk.org.

Cost is £195 single for double occupancy and £165 per person sharing twin/double.

Sussex Top Attractions Fair

Sussex Top Attractions is arranging a Group Visits/Days Out Fair for Friday March 2 in the Great Hall at Saint Hill Manor, near East Grinstead in West Sussex. Coach operators and group travel organisers are all invited to attend and meet representatives of more than 30 attractions in person and discuss group visits and days out plans for 2007. Admission is free.

Details can be found at www.sussextopattractions.co.uk/groups



Many CTC members exhibited at the ever popular Excursions 2007 show at Alexandra Palace on January 13. Pictured are Dawn Ross and Joanne Howe of London's Transport Museum.

Group Leisure at NEC

CTC will again be taking a 'Village' stand at the International Group Leisure & Travel Show taking place at NEC in Birmingham on September 20-21. Last year's event was extremely popular with members.

If any member is interested in taking space in the CTC Village at a special rate, please register your interest now by e-mailing admin@coachtourismcouncil.co.uk. Costs to be confirmed, depending on how many members wish to exhibit.

Bournemouth Conference

Final call! With just a few weeks to go there are still some places left to join the annual BCH/CTC Coach Holiday Conference being held at the Queens Hotel in Bournemouth from February

LAPLAND



Brits flock to see Santa

As more and more UK holidaymakers make the trip to Lapland to meet the real Father Christmas, Michael Steed argues that coach operators could be playing a bigger part in getting them there

In the four weeks leading up to last Christmas, 85,000 British tourists flew over 1,500 miles to the Lapland Arctic in Finland to search out the 'real' Father Christmas. Few, it would appear, travelled there having booked through a coach operator, one of those growing numbers of companies who now additionally offer their clients air and long-haul holidays. Surprising when you consider that a high percentage of those signing the booking forms on these Lapland Santa tours are

grandparents in the same age group that dominate the client database of most coach operators.

Perhaps it is because coach companies have been slow to notice the birth and rapid growth of this new and novel tour product. The figure of 85,000 has grown from 45,000 in the last five seasons.

The tours, which vary from an extended day excursion to five days, are unique in that you are travelling to an imaginary world hoping to meet the world's most famous fictional character.



Claus

As leading Lapland operator Canterbury Travel's clever strap logo describes it, you are merging fantasy with reality. Seeing the elves working away in Santa's toy factory and in his hectic 'North Pole' post office, and then meeting St Nick in his snow-clad forest hideaway, requires fantasy imagination - something not lacking in young children. But there is nothing unreal in riding there in a fur-rugged sleigh drawn by reindeer or husky dogs, or having the opportunity to spend a night in an ice igloo.

While the excitement to children is magical, it is not restricted to youngsters. Adults can be thrilled at the rare beauty of the Arctic winter - a natural wilderness of snow-covered forest, fells and iced lakes. They have the same enjoyment as the kids staying in cabins with log fires blazing, in riding a husky-drawn sleigh and joining them in tobogganing and snowball fights.

To parents and grandparents, though, their greatest thrill on a Santa Lapland tour is the expression of joy on the young children's faces when first meeting the 'real' Father Christmas, being personally greeted by their name and then being given a present they really wanted (it having been secretly flown to Lapland in Mum

and Dad's luggage).

There are a few extra and optional adventures for older children and adults, such as night driving your own powerful snowmobile at 60 kilometres an hour along flare-lit forest tracks.

Several of the resorts have small ski areas and there is normally time after the day's touring (which generally ends about four o'clock) to take to the gentle, floodlit slopes.

According to Steve Mitchell from Finland specialist, Emagine Travel, an interesting development in recent years has been the growing numbers of couples of all ages who are, without children, buying pre-Christmas Lapland winter wonderland tours as a novel, themed and adventurous short break. >

Husky dogs pulling Santa's sleigh? It must be Rudolph's day off...

LAPLAND

So the market potential is expanding and all operators state that client satisfaction is enormously high. This point should not be lost on coach operators, as it means repeat business, particularly grandparents who take one set of young grandchildren to Santaland and two years later they are back with another set of grandchildren.

So isn't this novel tour product worth demanding more attention by coach operators seeking new ideas? Apart from Christmas markets, early December is a quiet period for coach tours so a 'We are off to see the real Father Christmas' could make an interesting innovation to their programme.

Finland's Arctic Lapland is one of the most uncommercialised areas of Europe. That is apart from just four or five weeks annually when isolated log cabins and forestry barns are suddenly transformed into a Christmas present den or an imaginary worldwide post office full of 'Dear Santa, please can I have...' letters.

In recent years, responding to the growth of the pre-Christmas Santa-seeking tours, some commercialism has crept into the Lapland capital town of Rovaniemi, with a Father Christmas shopping village and a small Santa theme park. But most tours are based in small villages beside lakes and rivers which in the spring and summer are isolated Finnish vacation resorts for outdoor activities such as fishing, trekking and canoeing. Much of the accommodation is in log cabins and this makes ideal atmospheric family bases for the Santa tours.

Lapland is also a 'midnight sun' area in the summer, which means there are a few days in December when the sun does not rise, giving only about five to six hours of twilight. It is also cold, with temperatures below freezing. All operators provide free heavy one-piece thermal suits and boots to their clients on arrival and advise that the tours are not suitable for those aged three and under.

The market for Father Christmas tours was developed by specialist Finland operators such as Canterbury Travel, Emagine and Scantours, but now the bigger boys have joined the bandwagon. For 2007, Thomas Cook and First Choice have just published dedicated Santa Claus Lapland brochures which is giving enormous exposure to the idea of taking the children and grandchildren to seek out Father Christmas working away with his elves preparing for his annual festive



Ho! Ho! Ho! Traditional Lapland costume, above left, adds colour to the Santa Tours experience, where traditional wooden buildings are transformed into 'post offices', above right, for letters to the great man himself, below



Isolated log cabins are transformed into post offices full of 'Dear Santa...' letters

chimney-hopping sleigh-ride.

Any coach company considering linking up with a Lapland operator should carefully take account of what is included in their package. Most of the activities with, for example, Emagine and Canterbury - husky rides, reindeer sledges, snowmobiles, tobogganing etc - are free, but with some operators these are expensive optionals.

How to join the Santa Tours Bandwagon

It is a simple exercise for coach operators to offer Santa Lapland tours. You contact one of the specialist Lapland operators and negotiate a reduced group rate for a departure from your nearest international airport. There are regular departures throughout December from 23 different airports - not just major ones such as Gatwick,

Birmingham, Manchester and Glasgow, but smaller regional airports such as Exeter, Bournemouth, Cardiff, Norwich, Humberside and Teeside. There are also flights from Belfast, Dublin and Cork.

You organise return transfers to the airport from your local areas in the normal way and the package is complete.

Day tours involve a long day. With few exceptions, airport departure is between 07:30 and 08:30 and with a minimum one hour earlier check-in time there is going to be a very early local departure. Return arrivals are generally between 21:00 and 22:00 hours.

Two-day tours have similar flight schedules. There is quite a uniform flying timetable among operators for three, four and five-day tours. There is generally a take-off time between 10:00 and 11:00, with return landing between 18:00 and 19:00, giving you reasonably respectable local transfer timings.

If you wish to consider joining the Lapland pre-Christmas bandwagon, first try Emagine Travel, a Finland specialist whose managing director has been involved in promoting Lapland for 35 years.

They sell as a trade wholesaler as well as direct selling to the public. Therefore using their product, your tour will not be the same as could be found in any travel agent, something creative coach companies seek.

Emagine's contact is Steve Mitchell on 0870 902 5399.

It is important to note that, legally, the coach company only operate as an agent to the licensed ATOL holding operator and this must be clearly stated in promotional material. It would be advisable to check the latest government licensing regulations. ●





Briefly

■ To coach operators, the financial rewards in selling these novel Arctic tours can be high. They are not cheap, but this has not restricted the rapid growth in their popularity. They have real saleability despite day tours being £300-plus and the popular four-days breaks near £1,000. So however you calculate your costings and mark-up, the profit from one booking for a family of four totalling £4,000 should be handsome.

■ There are also considerable benefits to an operator's cash-flow for balance payment is made in October, the most critical cash-flow month of the year for many operators.

■ Lapland hotels are generally of a good 3-star standard. Being Finnish, all have saunas and many have indoor swimming pools. Often hotels have in the adjoining forest and within reasonable walking distance, collections of log cabins with sauna, open log fire and are well equipped for families. Meals are taken in the main hotel and sledges for pulling young children there are found lying around for free use everywhere in the village resorts.

■ In the villages used by Canterbury Travel and Emagine there are children's clubs operating for a couple of hours late afternoon giving adults a rest or shopping opportunity. Most hotels have buffet-style meals with simple but varied child menus.

■ A real bonus to British visitors can be the sight of the Arctic Northern Lights. This unique Aurora Borealis light phenomenon can on a clear evening suddenly produce an array of white and red or green lights dancing in the sky. Quite a sight! It is caused by solar winds interacting with the earth's magnetic field, which is strong in North Pole regions.

■ The explosion in pre-Christmas tours to Lapland has brought an out of season boom to Finnish coach operators. Some days there are over 200 coaches handling British tourists arriving at five Lapland airports. There is not this number of coaches available locally so vehicles are sub-hired from as far as Helsinki, 500 miles away.

■ Arctic Lapland is the latest romantic craze destination for British couples getting married.

HERITAGE RAILWAYS

Steam and scenery – a magnificent combination

While steam trains are an outmoded form of transport in today's world, they can still be experienced at Britain's many heritage railways. Mike Wild reveals a selection of the best attractions with a hint of nostalgia

In Britain you don't have to travel far to discover historic buildings and industry and the same can be said for the preservation of railway routes. There are hundreds of miles of railway spread throughout the country that have been saved by preservationists to keep the traditions of steam alive.

These railways have been rebuilt by volunteers following their closure by British Rail and they now provide excellent days out and the chance to relive a transport mode that was common to anyone who travelled by train until the late 1960s.

As passenger demand has increased, preservationists have developed their sites to provide more than just a train ride, with museum buildings, catering facilities, coach parking arrangements and impressively restored period buildings – some of which have been moved brick by brick to new locations.

This feature provides an introduction to some of the best railway attractions in Britain...

Bluebell Railway

Main stations: Sheffield Park, Horsted Keynes, Kingscote

Coach parking available: Yes, Sheffield Park only, no parking at Kingscote

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Southern at War May 12-13, Bluebell 125 August 11/12, 1920s Weekend November 17/18

Line length: Eight miles (35 mins one-way)

The Bluebell Railway is unique among Britain's preserved railways in that all passenger trains are steam-hauled. All other preserved lines are home both to steam and diesel locomotives.

Adding to the atmosphere is the unrivalled fleet of vintage carriages. Some date back to the 1890s, while others are from the 1930s and 1950s.

The railway itself is backed by three period stations at Sheffield Park, Horsted Keynes and Kingscote, all of which have been fully restored. Horsted Keynes is the most impressive,

as this was once a junction station. It boasts five platforms and a goods yard with all the station buildings and canopies restored.

For the cream of the former Southern Railway, the Bluebell is the place to visit.

■ **For more information call 01825 720800 or visit www.bluebell-railway.co.uk**

Bodmin and Wenford Railway

Main stations: Bodmin General, Bodmin Parkway

Coach parking available: No

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: To be announced

Line length: 6.5 miles

The Bodmin and Wenford Railway (BWR) is Cornwall's only preserved full-size railway, and the most westerly in Britain. It is characterised by the rolling hills of north Cornwall and consists of two branch lines which meet at Bodmin General station. The BWR typifies a West of England branch line in the 1950s.

The first line runs from Bodmin Parkway station, where cross platform connections can be made with main line services to and from London and Penzance, to Bodmin General, while the second branch runs from Bodmin General to the former Boscarne Junction where a simple platform has been built. At Boscarne Junction the railway meets the Camel Trail, which allows walkers to explore the old trackbed to Wenfordbridge in one direction and Wadebridge in the other.

The station at Bodmin General is the main structure on the railway and includes a buffet and gift shop. Bodmin Parkway and Boscarne Junction have only basic platforms, although a café is based on one of the platforms at Bodmin Parkway.

This line is closed for the winter, but reopens in mid-March for the 2007 season.

■ **For more information call 01208 73666 or visit www.bodminandwenfordrailway.co.uk**

Churnet Valley Railway

Main stations: Cheddleton, Kingsley and Froghall

Coach parking available: Set-down only at Cheddleton, parking at Froghall

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Canal and Steam Cruises (dates to be announced)

Line length: 5.25 miles (40 mins one-way)

The Churnet Valley Railway is situated just a few miles from Stoke-on-Trent in a valley largely untouched by road traffic. In fact, the only way to travel between Cheddleton and the intermediate station of Consall Forge is by rail or canal.

The CVR's location gives it a unique atmosphere, and during the high season Canal and Steam Cruises are operated.

Starting from Cheddleton, the railway runs first south to Kingsley and Froghall where a new station building has been built before returning north through the delightful setting of Consall Forge, Cheddleton and Leek Brook junction. Stations are located at Cheddleton, Consall Forge and Kingsley and Froghall.

■ **For more information call 01538 360522 or visit www.churnet-valley-railway.co.uk**

Didcot Railway Centre

Main stations: Didcot

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 40 75 Anniversary May 5-7, An Audience with Fire Fly June 30/July 1, Late Summer Holiday Victorian Steamings August 25-27

Line length: 1 mile

Unlike the majority of the railways listed here, Didcot Railway Centre is not a full railway, but a former locomotive shed expanded with a short demonstration line, historic buildings and museum facilities.

Didcot Railway Centre is located between the national network routes from London to Oxford and London to

Recapture the past at the Bluebell Railway in rural Sussex





Bristol. The collection of locomotives is looked after by the Great Western Society, and this year marks 40 years for the society.

Didcot has steam days most weekends and operates demonstration trains on a regular basis during the week in the summer. Additional events include An Audience with Fire Fly - the centre's working replica of an early broad gauge locomotive - on June 30/July 1 and Victorian Steamings on August 25-27.

■ For more information call 01235 817200 or visit www.didcotrailwaycentre.org.uk

East Lancashire Railway

Main stations: Bury, Ramsbottom

Coach parking available: Set-down only at Bury station

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 1940s Wartime Weekend May 26-28

Line length: 12 miles (35 mins one-way)

The East Lancashire Railway was reopened by preservationists in 1987. The railway runs from Bury, near Manchester, through a country park and into the Irwell Vale before reaching the terminus at Ramsbottom. The line also extends south from Bury to Heywood, crossing an impressive viaduct.

Passenger trains run every weekend of the year, and during the summer daily steam-hauled services are operated. In addition to its steam locomotive fleet, the East Lancs also has a substantial fleet of diesel locomotives.

■ For more information call 0161 764 7790 or visit www.east-lancs-rly.co.uk

Ffestiniog Railway

Main stations: Porthmadog, Blaenau

Ffestiniog

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 175 Anniversary Celebrations May 28, Jazz Trains August 2, 9, 16, 23

Line length: 13.5-miles

The Ffestiniog Railway is one of the earliest railways to be preserved. The 2ft gauge railway was built to transport slate from the mines around Blaenau Ffestiniog to Porthmadog for onward transportation.

Today the railway is operated for tourists and boasts an impressive collection of Victorian carriages and locomotives representing the early years of its operation together with later developments introduced by preservationists.

As well as running the 13.5-mile line between Porthmadog and Blaenau >

HERITAGE RAILWAYS

Ffestiniog, the management also runs the rebuilt section of the Welsh Highland Line between Caernarfon and Rhyd Ddu using former South African locomotives. In the future these two lines will meet at Porthmadog through a project to rebuild the entire 40-mile 2ft gauge line between Caernarfon and Porthmadog to allow connections.

■ For more information call 01766 516000 or visit www.festrail.co.uk

Great Central Railway

Main stations: Loughborough, Leicester North

Coach parking available: No

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 1960s Weekend March 23-25, Edwardian Evening March 31, May Day Weekend May 5-7, War Weekend June 16/17, Mail by Rail July 28/29

Line length: 8 miles (30 mins one-way)

The Great Central Railway is home to the only section of restored double-track standard gauge railway in the country. Its headquarters are at Loughborough in the large period station that stands on Great Central Road. Trains pass through the countryside to Quorn and Woodhouse and Rothley before reaching the terminus at Leicester.

The stations on the GCR are particularly well restored. Quorn and Woodhouse is set in the 1940s and includes a wartime café set under the road bridge, with period lighting. Rothley has been restored to its 1920s heyday with gas lighting and original period buildings.

Many events take place on this busy line each year, including Edwardian evenings at Rothley station, a War Weekend in June and the Mail by Rail gala in July, where ground apparatus is used to swap mail bags with the passing train without the need for it to stop.

■ For more information call 01509 230726 or visit www.gcrailway.co.uk

Isle of Wight Steam Railway

Main stations: Wootton, Haven Street, Smallbrook Junction

Coach parking available: Parking at Wootton and Haven Street only

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 1940s Weekends June 23/24 and June 30/July 1

Line length: 5 miles (20 mins one-way)

The Isle of Wight is a beautiful location in its own right, and it is also home to a steam railway running from Wootton, close to the port at Fishbourne, to Smallbrook Junction in the east.



Goathland Station on the North Yorkshire Moors Railway is the setting for Adensfield in TV's Heartbeat

The railway is idyllic and has an impressive set of vintage carriages dating back to 1864 and steam locomotives. The four stations have all been fully restored to fit with the vintage trains.

The Isle of Wight is just 30 minutes from Portsmouth Harbour using Wight Link ferry services.

■ For more information call 01983 882204 or visit www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk

Llangollen Railway

Main stations: Llangollen, Carrog

Coach parking available: In town

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 'Steel Steam and Stars' April 20-22

Line length: 7.5 miles (35 mins one-way)

The Llangollen Railway follows the River Dee from Llangollen to Carrog. Like many preserved railways the line is still being developed, and in the future it is hoped to reopen the line to Corwen.

This railway is one of a handful of standard gauge preserved lines in Wales. The station at Llangollen sits right on the bank of the River Dee and is fully restored with buffet facilities and a period feel. The route passes through Berwyn - where the railway sits high on

the valley side overlooking the river - to Glyndyfrdwy and Carrog. Special events take place throughout the year.

■ For more information call 01978 860979 or visit www.llangollen-railway.co.uk

Mid Hants Railway

Main stations: Alresford, Alton

Coach parking available: Yes, Alresford only by prior arrangement

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 30th Anniversary Event April 28/29, War on the Line June 23/24, Morris Day July 1,

Line length: 10 miles (35 mins one-way)

Situated just south of Basingstoke and not more than an hour's journey from the M25, the Mid Hants Railway runs between Alton and Alresford through attractive countryside.

The railway was re-opened in 1977 by the Mid Hants Railway Preservation Society, and is now a fully working railway with its own locomotive depot, four stations, and a connection to the national railway network at Alton.

The Mid Hants Railway's headquarters are at Alresford where there is a visitor centre located in the old goods shed, buffet, historic goods office reconstruction and the offices for the



The NYMR also operates steam-hauled trains between Glaisdale, Grosmont and Whitby along the main line railway during the summer. Owing to the fact it is based in the North Yorkshire Moors there are ample opportunities for walking around the railway, with the option to alight from the train service at either Levisham for a walk on the moors of Goathland to explore the village.

■ **For more information call 01751 472508 or visit www.northyorkshiremoorsrailway.com**

North Norfolk Railway

Main stations: Sheringham, Holt

Coach parking available: Yes, Sheringham

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Vintage Transport Festival July 8, Beer Festival July 13-15, 1940s Weekend September 15/16

Line length: 5.25-miles (45 mins one-way)

Starting from the seaside town of Sheringham, the North Norfolk Railway hugs the coastline to the village of Weybourne before turning inland and travelling through the wooded hills of Kelling Heath to reach the market town of Holt. This is a relatively short line at 5.25 miles long, but it can also be used as an alternative way to visit

The Tayllyn is Britain's oldest restored railway



railway staff. The stations at Ropley and Medsted and Four Marks boast restored period buildings and traditional railway atmosphere.

■ **For more information call 01962 733810 or visit www.watercressline.co.uk**

North Yorkshire Moors Railway

Main stations: Pickering, Goathland, Grosmont

Coach parking available: Set-down only, with parking in town at Pickering

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Back to the '60s June 16/17, Music on the Moors August 26/27, Wartime Weekend October 12-14

Line length: 18 miles (1hr 5min one-way)

The North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR) is among the most visited of the preserved railways in the country. The village of Goathland, which is served by the railway, is well known for its use as the location for the TV series *Heartbeat* for which the station is transformed into 'Aidensfield'. Goathland also appeared as 'Hogsmeade' in the film *'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone'*.

The railway passes through the scenic North Yorkshire Moors National Park, winding its way to Pickering.

Sheringham by joining the train at Holt.

At Sheringham there is a substantial station with a buffet, gift shop and period fittings, while Weybourne is a Midland and Great Northern Joint Railway station restored to its former glory with station buildings and signalbox. This station is also the location of the locomotive sheds.

Holt is the end of the line, and a location which has changed dramatically with the rebuilding of Stalham station, Thursford goods shed and a new platform in the last three years. The main season starts on February 3 and the NNR runs throughout the rest of the year with specials events taking place on selected weekends.

■ **For more information call 01263 820800 or visit www.nnr.co.uk**

Paignton and Dartmouth Steam Railway

Main stations: Paignton, Kingswear

Coach parking available: Paignton only

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Dartmouth Regatta Firework Specials August 24 and 26

Line length: 7 miles (30 mins one-way)

The Paignton and Dartmouth Steam Railway is primarily run for tourists. It hugs the Torbay coastline for the first section of the journey before turning inland at Churston to reach the Dart estuary and Kingswear, where the railway connects with a ferry service to Dartmouth. The railway is steeped in the tradition of its builder - the Great Western Railway - with appropriately painted stations and trains.

■ **For more information call 01803 555872 or visit www.paignton-steamrailway.co.uk**

Romney Hythe and Dymchurch Railway

Main stations: Hythe, Dungeness

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: No

Line length: 13.5 miles (1hr 5min one-way)

The Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway was built with tracks just 15in apart. It was opened in July 1927 by Captain Howey as the 'World's Smallest Public Railway' and crossing marshland between Hythe and Dungeness.

Despite the small size of the trains, the railway runs a total distance of 13.5 miles at a maximum speed of 25mph. The railway was used for defence during the Second World War when specially-built armoured trains plied the route.

Today it is a social affair run by volunteers and one that continues to >

HERITAGE RAILWAYS

enthrall its visitors year after year.

■ **For more information call 01797 362353 or visit www.rhdr.org.uk**

Severn Valley Railway

Main stations: Bridgnorth, Kidderminster

Coach parking available: Set-down point and parking

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: 1940s Weekends June 23/24 and June 30/July 1, Severn Valley in Bloom July 28/29, Bridgnorth Beer Festival September 15/16

Line length: 16 miles (1hr 10min one-way)

Running between Kidderminster and Bridgnorth, and less than 30 minutes from Birmingham, the Severn Valley Railway follows its namesake river through lovely countryside.

The railway turns the clock back to the 1950s and earlier with its early rolling stock and locomotive fleet which ply the 16-mile route on a weekly basis for the enjoyment of visitors. The SVR is a tourist railway first and foremost, although it is run by dedicated enthusiasts and a small full-time staff.

A journey along the railway takes just over one hour, passing through restored country stations and the busy town of Bewdley, just a few miles from Kidderminster. The station

at Kidderminster includes a licensed refreshment room and most trains include a buffet car.

The big news at the SVR is the Severn Valley Railway Visitor Centre at Highley. This brand-new building is due to open during the summer and will house some of the locomotives that are awaiting restoration together with many other artifacts from the SVR's collection.

■ **For more information call 01299 403816 or visit www.svr.co.uk**

Snowdon Mountain Railway

Main stations: Llanberis

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: Yes

Line length: 4.5 miles (2hr 30min round trip)

The Snowdon Mountain Railway is Britain's highest rack railway, carrying passengers from Llanberis to the summit of Mt Snowdon, 3,560ft above sea level. Trains run from the first week of March until the first week of November each year (weather permitting) using both steam and diesel locomotives.

The Snowdon Mountain Railway opened in 1896 and the original locomotives are still in regular use on the mountain line.

■ **For more information call 0870 458 0033 or visit www.snowdonrailway.co.uk**

Strathspey Railway

Main stations: Aviemore, Broomhill

Coach parking available: Yes, in the town

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Steam Fair July, Abernethy Games August

Line length: 10 miles (45 mins one-way)

With the Cairngorms as a backdrop, the Strathspey Railway stretches north to Broomhill along the banks of the River Nethy. The majority of passenger services are hauled by steam locomotives, although on occasion diesels are used. Broomhill has been used as the setting of Glenbogle station for the BBC series *Monarch of the Glen*.

■ **For more information call 01479 810725 or visit www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk**

Swanage Railway

Main stations: Swanage, Norden

Coach parking available: Norden P&R

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Easter Specials April 6-9, Swanage Railway Beer Festival May 11-13, 40th Anniversary of the end of Southern Steam July 7-9, Swanage Regatta and Carnival July 28-August 4

Line length: 6 miles (25 mins one-way)

The Swanage Railway serves a dual purpose as both a heritage steam

The Severn Valley Railway shadows the course of mainland Britain's longest river



THE RAILWAYS: LOCATIONS AND CONTACTS

■ Avon Valley Railway

Bitton, Bristol
Tel: 0117 932 7296

Website: www.avonvalleyrailway.org

■ The Battlefield Line Railway

Shakerstone, Leicestershire
Tel: 01827 880754

Website: www.battlefield-line-railway.co.uk

■ Beamish Working Museum

Beamish, County Durham
Tel: 0191 370 4000

Website: www.beamish.org.uk

■ Bluebell Railway

Sheffield Park, East Sussex
Tel: 01825 720800

Website: www.bluebell-railway.co.uk

■ Bodmin and Wenford Railway

Bodmin, Cornwall
Tel: 01208 73666

Website: www.bodminandwenfordrailway.co.uk

■ Bowes Railway

Washington, Newcastle
Tel: 0191 416 1847

Website:

www.bowesrailway.co.uk

■ Bredgar and Wormshill Light Railway

Sittingbourne, Kent
Tel: 01622 884 254

Website: www.bwlr.co.uk

■ Bressingham Steam

Experience (including gardens) Bressingham, Norfolk
Tel: 01379 686900

Website: www.bressingham.co.uk

■ Buckinghamshire Railway Centre

Quainton Road, Buckinghamshire
Tel: 01296 655450

Website: www.bucksrailcentre.org

■ Bure Valley Railway

Aylsham, Norfolk
Tel: 01263 733858

Website: www.bvrw.co.uk

■ Chasewater Railway

Chasewater, Staffordshire
Tel: 01543 452623

Website: www.chasewater railway.co.uk

■ Chinnor and Princes Risborough Railway

Chinnor, Oxfordshire
Tel: 01844 353535

Website: www.cprra.co.uk

■ Cholsey and Wallingford Railway

Cholsey, Oxfordshire
Tel: 01491 835067

Website: www.cholsey-wallingford-railway.com

■ Churnet Valley Railway

Cheddleton, Staffordshire
Tel: 01538 360522

Website: www.churnetvalleyrailway.co.uk

■ Colne Valley Railway

Castle Hedingham, Essex
Tel: 01787 461174

Website: www.colnevalleyrailway.co.uk

■ Dean Forest Railway

Norchard, Gloucestershire
Tel: 01594 843423

Website: www.deanforestrailway.co.uk

■ Didcot Railway Centre

Didcot, Oxfordshire
Tel: 01235 817200

Website: www.didcotrailwaycentre.org.uk

■ East Anglian Railway

Museum Chappel and Wakes Colne, Essex

Tel: 01206 242524

Website: www.earm.co.uk

■ East Lancashire Railway

Bury, Lancashire
Tel: 0161 764 7790

Website: www.east-lancs-rly.co.uk

■ East Somerset Railway

Cranmore, Somerset
Tel: 01749 800417

Website: www.eastsomerset railway.com

■ Embsay and Bolton Abbey Steam Railway

Near Skipton, North Yorkshire
Tel: 01756 710614

Website: www.embsayboltonabbeyrailway.org.uk

■ Foxfield Steam Railway

Blythe Bridge, Staffordshire
Tel: 01782 396210

Website: www.foxfieldrailway.co.uk

■ Gloucestershire

■ Warwickshire Railway

Toddington, Gloucestershire
Tel: 01242 621405

Website: www.gwsr.com

■ Great Central Railway

Loughborough, Leicestershire
Tel: 01509 230726

Website: www.gcrailway.co.uk

■ Isle of Wight Steam Railway

Haven Street, Isle of Wight
Tel: 01983 882204

Website: www.iwsteamrailway.co.uk

■ Keighley and Worth Valley Railway

Keighley, West Yorkshire
Tel: 01535 645214

Website: www.kwvr.co.uk

■ Kent and East Sussex

Railway Tenterden, Kent
Tel: 01580 762943

Website: www.kesr.org.uk

■ Lakeside and Haverthwaite Railway

Haverthwaite, near Ulverston, Cumbria
Tel: 01539 531594

Website: www.lakesiderailway.co.uk

■ Lavender Line

Isfield, East Sussex
Tel: 01825 750515

Website: www.lavender-line.co.uk

■ Leighton Buzzard Railway

Leighton Buzzard, Bedfordshire
Tel: 01525 373888

Website: www.buzzrail.co.uk



Swanage stations have been restored.

The seaside aspect of Swanage adds another reason to visit, plus with Corfe Castle so close to the railway there is plenty to do in the area.

■ **For more information call 01929 425800 or visit www.swanagerailway.co.uk**

Talyllyn Railway

Main station: Tywyn

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Victorian Train June 14 and 28, July 12, September 6, 13 and 20

Line length: 7.25-miles (55 mins one-way)

Situated on the west coast of Wales, the Talyllyn Railway was the first railway line to be preserved by enthusiasts in 1951. Enthusiasts secured the entire route from Tywyn to the slate mines at Nant Gwernol and some of the original locomotives, carriages and wagons that once served the local area.

It is a narrow-gauge railway. The station at Tywyn Wharf has undergone major renovation.

The 1860s vintage Victorian Train is a popular feature of the railway's calendar together with the Victorian Week from July 29-August 2.

■ **For more information call 01654 710472 or visit www.talyllyn.co.uk**

West Somerset Railway

Main stations: Minehead, Bishops Lydeard

Coach parking available: Yes

Group discounts: Yes

Major events: Sunset Specials (dates to be announced), Murder Mystery Specials (dates to be announced), Steam Fayre and Vintage Vehicle Rally August 4/5

Line length: 22 miles (1hr 15min one-way)

The West Somerset Railway is the longest preserved steam railway in Britain, crossing the Quantock Hills between Bishops Lydeard and Minehead. Preservationists have been successful in securing the entire branch line and returning it to full working order with period stations, signaling and trains.

The seaside terminus at Minehead is a great destination with everything you would expect from a town of this nature. With the wonderful rolling hills on the southern section of the line and seaward views on the northern half, the journey is full of interest.

Following the winter shutdown, the West Somerset Railway reopens to the public on February 11 and then runs every weekend, with regular weekday running during the high season.

■ **For more information call 01643 704996 or visit www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk**

railway and a park and ride system for the bustling seaside town of Swanage. The line runs across the Isle of Purbeck from Norden, where park and ride facilities are available for both cars and coaches, past the remains of Corfe Castle to Harmans Cross and Swanage.

The line has its own fleet of steam locomotives and restored carriages. The stations at Norden and Harmans Cross have been built from scratch, as no station was built at either of these locations, while Corfe Castle and

■ **Locomotion – The NRM at Shildon**

Shildon, County Durham
Tel: 01388 777999

Website: www.locomotionuk.com

■ **Mid Hants Railway**

Alresford, Hampshire
Tel: 01962 733810

Website: www.watercressline.co.uk

■ **Midland Railway**

– Butterley Ripley, Derbyshire
Tel: 01773 747674

Website: www.midlandrailwaycentre.org.uk

■ **National Railway Museum**

York, North Yorkshire
Tel: 0870 421 4001

Website: www.nrm.org.uk

■ **Nene Valley Railway**

Wansford, Cambridgeshire
Tel: 01780 784444

Website: www.nvr.org.uk

■ **North Yorkshire**

Moors Railway
Pickering, North Yorkshire
Tel: 01751 472508

Website: www.northyorkshiremoorsrailway.com

■ **Paignton and Dartmouth Steam Railway**

Paignton, Devon
Tel: 01803 555872

■ **Peak Rail**

Matlock, Derbyshire
Tel: 01629 580381

Website: www.peakrail.co.uk

■ **North Norfolk Railway**

Sheringham, Norfolk
Tel: 01263 820800

Website: www.nnr.co.uk

■ **Ravenglass and Eskdale Railway**

Ravenglass, Cumbria
Tel: 01229 717171

Website: www.ravenglass-railway.co.uk

■ **Romney, Hythe and Dymchurch Railway**

Romney, Kent
Tel: 01797 362353

Website: www.rhdr.org.uk

■ **Severn Valley Railway**

Kidderminster, Worcestershire
Tel: 01299 403816

Website: www.svr.co.uk

■ **South Devon Railway**

Buckfastleigh, Devon
Tel: 0845 345 1470

Website: www.southdevonrailway.org

■ **Spa Valley Railway**

Tunbridge Wells, Kent
Tel: 01892 537715

Website: www.spavalleyrailway.co.uk

■ **STEAM – Museum of the Great Western Railway**

Swindon, Wiltshire
Tel: 01793 466646

Website: www.swindon.gov.uk/steam

■ **Swanage Railway**

Swanage, Dorset
Tel: 01929 425800

Website: www.swanagerailway.co.uk

■ **Tanfield Railway**

Gateshead, County Durham
Tel: 0191 388 7545

Website: www.tanfield-railway.co.uk

■ **Weardale Railway**

Stanhope, County Durham
Tel: 01388 526203

Website: www.weardale-railway.co.uk

■ **West Somerset Railway**

Minehead, Somerset
Tel: 01643 704996
Website: www.west-somerset-railway.co.uk

SCOTLAND

■ **Bo'ness and Kinneil**

Railway Bo'ness, West Lothian
Tel: 01506 825855

Website: www.srps.org.uk

■ **Caledonian Railway**

(Brechin) Brechin, Angus
Tel: 01356 622922

Website: www.caledonianrailway.co.uk

■ **Strathspey Railway**

Aviemore, Inverness-shire
Tel: 01479 810725

Website: www.strathspeyrailway.co.uk

WALES

■ **Bala Lake Railway**

Bala, Gwynedd
Tel: 01678 540666

Website: www.bala-lake-railway.co.uk

■ **Brecon Mountain Railway**

Merthyr Tydfil
Tel: 01685 722988

■ **Ffestiniog Railway**

Porthmadog, Gwynedd
Tel: 01766 516000

Website: www.festrail.co.uk

■ **Llanberis Lake Railway**

Llanberis, Gwynedd

Tel: 01286 870549

Website: www.lake-railway.co.uk

■ **Llangollen Railway**

Llangollen, Gwynedd
Tel: 01978 860979

Website: www.llangollenrailway.co.uk

■ **Welsh Highland Railway**

Caernarfon, Gwynedd
Tel: 01766 516000

Website: www.festrail.co.uk

■ **Snowdon Mountain**

Railway Llanberis, Gwynedd
Tel: 0870 458 0033

Website: www.snowdonrailway.co.uk

■ **Talyllyn Railway**

Tywyn, Gwynedd
Tel: 01654 710472

Website: www.talyllyn.co.uk

■ **Vale of Rheidol Railway**

Aberystwyth, Ceredigion
Tel: 01970 625819

Website: www.rheidolrailway.co.uk

■ **Welshpool and Llanfair**

Light Railway Welshpool, Mid Wales
Tel: 01938 810441

Website: www.wllr.org.uk

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1990 408d mini
bus with tuckaway
chair lift and unwind
tracking. no MOT,
running order

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OPTIMO**
21 high back seats,
table, MoT 2007.
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T REG IVECO TURBO DAILY



49.10, 2.8 TD, MANUAL, P A S, LWB, HIGH ROOF, IRIS BUS, 15 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY, ONE OWNER, 68,500 KMS COIF.

51 REG RENAULT MASTER



LM35, 2.5DCI, .5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH FOLD OUT STEP, 10 SEATS INC DRIVER PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 41,000 MILES ONLY.

2000 W REG VOLKSWAGEN LT46



DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, LWB, PAS, HIGH ROOF, SIDE LOADING ELECTRIC POWER DOOR WITH LOW STEP, 16 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING FOR 5 W/CHAIRS, RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER EX CHARITY, 60,000 MILES ONLY

S REG FORD TRANSIT 230



2.5 TD, MANUAL, P A S, LWB, CHASSIS DEVELOPMENT COACHBUILT BUS, 12 REMOVABLE SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON 2030 TAIL LIFT, POWER DOOR FRONT ENTRY, ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY,

Y REG IVECO BUS 40C11



2.8 TD, LWB HIGH ROOF, PAS, 5 SPEED MANUAL GEARBOX, DIPTAC FRONT ENTRY DOOR, EUROMOTIVE CONVERSION, 17 RESTCROFT SEATS, PURMO HEATER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, 78,000 MILES, GOOD CONDITION, COIF.

R REG, MERCEDES SPRINTER 312D



2.8 TURBO DIESEL, UVG LAZER BODY, PAS, LWB, SIDE DOOR, TWIN YORK 4 STRETCHERS, WITH SEAT BACKS, BULK HEAD DOOR, EBERSPACHER HEATER, STROBE BLUES & SIREN, ONE OWNER, GOOD CONDITION,

2003 03 REG LONDON TAXI TX11



GOLD, DIESEL, AUTOMATIC, PAS, TWIN SIDE ENTRY DOORS, SIDE FITTED FOLD DOWN RAMP FOR WHEELCHAIR ACCESS, AIR CON, ELECTRIC WINDOWS, CD CHANGER, LIGHT METALIC BLUE, HIGH SPEC, ONLY 35,500 MILES WARRANTED. MINT CONDITION,

53 REG RENAULT MASTER



MM35 D, 2.5, .5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 16,000 MILES ONLY.

2000-2002 FIAT / Ducatos 2.8 TD



PAS, MOBILE OFFICE / CLINIC / TREATMENT CENTRE/ EXPO UNIT, SEPARATE KITCHIN FITTED WITH MICROWAVE, SINK & FRIDGE, FULL AIR CON AND HEATING, SILENT RUNNING GENERATOR, AWNING FITTED ON N/S, SECURITY ENTRY & ALARM SYSTEM, SIDE & REAR ENTRANCE DOORS WITH STEP AND RAMP AT REAR FOR WHEELCHAIR ACCESS, ONE OWNER, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY, ALL VERY LOW MILES, COST OVER £70,000 NEW. CHOICE OF 5

54 REG 2004 RENAULT MASTER



LM39D, 2.5, MANUAL GEARBOX, PAS, LWB, ABS, SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH STEP, 16 TESTED M2 HIGH BACK SEATS PLUS DRIVER, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 6000 - 20,000 miles ONLY. CHOICE OF TWO

M REG MERCEDES 709



M REG MERCEDES 709, CUNLIFFE CONVERSION, LONG WHEELBASE HIGH ROOF, 24 SEMI HIGH BACK SEATS PLUS WHEEL CHAIRS, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, FRONT ENTRY POWER DOOR WITH FOLD-DOWN STEP, EX LOCAL AUTHORITY

53 REG RENAULT MASTER MM35 D



2.5, .5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 1 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN SOLO, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 30,000 MILES ONLY.

2003 52 REG RENAULT MASTER MM33



2.2 DCI, .5 SPEED, PAS, MWB, HIGH ROOF, TWIN SIDE LOADING DOORS WITH AVS STEP, 8 + HIGH BACK SEATS + DRIVER OR 5 + 2 WHEELCHAIRS, RICON TAIL LIFT, UNWIN TRACKING, SILVER METALIC PAINT, ONE OWNER, 27,500M

UN-REGISTERED IRIS BUS - IVECO 50C15



UN REGISTERED IRIS BUS, IVECO 50.C15 3.0HDI TD, 16 ABACUS SEATS, POWER FRONT ENTRY DOOR, HIGH ROOF, BONDED WINDOWS, TESTED FLAT FLOOR, UNWIN TRACKING, HEATER, RATCLIFF UNDER FLOOR TAIL LIFT, NEW STOCK.

2001 Y REG MERCEDES 411 CDI



SPRINTER, DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, LWB, PAS, HIGH ROOF, SLD WITH FOLD OUT STEP, 15 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING FOR 5 W/CHAIRS, HEATER, RATCLIFF UNDERFLOOR TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER EX CHARITY, 75,000 MILES

3 RENAULT MASTER SM33 D



2.5, .5 SPEED, PAS, SWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 2 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, EBERSPACHER HEATER, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER,

2001 Y REG VOLKSWAGEN



LT46 2.5DIESEL, 5 SPEED MANUAL, LWB, PAS, HIGH ROOF, AIR CON, SLD WITH AVS STEP, HEATER, 14 HIGH BACK SEATS, UNWIN TRACKING FOR 5 W/CHAIRS, RICON INBOARD TAIL LIFT, ONE OWNER EX LOCAL AUTHORITY AVERAGE 50,000 MILES CHOICE OF 5

2005 54 RENAULT MASTER LM39



2.5DCI, .5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, MELLOR CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 14 SEATS, PLUS 3 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 17,000 MILES ONLY.

AUG 02 MITSUBISHI CANTER



AUG 02 MITSUBISHI CANTER, DOUBLE CAB, NON HGV, 176" BEAVER TAIL BODY, ALLY DROP SIDES, 24VOLT 4 TON WINCH, ALLY RAMPS, REAR LOCKER, 12 VOLT SUPPLY AT REAR FOR TOWING, EXTENDING TOW BAR, ONLY 27,500 KMS

04 REG RENAULT MASTER



LM35, 2.5DCI, .5 SPEED, PAS, LWB, O & H MINIBUS CONVERSION SIDE LOADING DOOR WITH AVS STEP, 8 SEATS, PLUS 3 WHEELCHAIR POSITION, UNWIN TRACKING, RICON TAIL LIFT, E MINT CONDITION ONE OWNER, 47,000 MILES ONLY.

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NEW MODEL 17 seat, 140ps.
Ex-demonstrator, 5000 miles. **£20,500.**

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LDV MINIBUSES

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(04) LDV Convoy 17 seat 2.4 td 90ps high roof, high back seats, 30,000 miles in white **COIF/PSV £8,995**



(04) LDV Convoy 17 seat 2.4 td 90ps high roof, high back seats, 21,000 miles in white **COIF/PSV £9,495**



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(01) LDV Pilot. 9 seat. 1.9 Diesel, 5 speed. High-back seats. 26,000 miles. **£3,495.**

R(98) LDV Convoy. 2.5 diesel. 13 seat SWV. 50,000 miles- Ex-MoD, in white. **£3,495.**

OTHER MAKES

(02) Fiat Ducato 17 seat 2.8 td LWB high roof, high back seats crest conversion in white 27,000 miles **COIF/PSV £8,995**

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE



51 LDV Convoy. Front entry drop step. Power door and fully tracked with under-floor tail-lift. 42,000 miles. **£11,495.**



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T(99) Iveco. 16 seats. Front entry powered door. Under-floor tail-lift. **COIF/PSV £8,250.**



T (99) LDV Convoy 9 seat front entry drop step, wheelchair tracking under floor tail lift 78,000 miles in white choice **£6,995**



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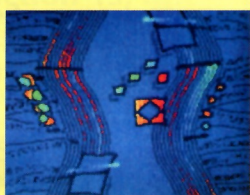
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2000 (W) MERCEDES 614D/CREST



22 High back seats + Courier seat, 3 point seatbelts, **Very Large Boot**, luggage racks, tinted windows, stereo/cassette/PA, Euroliner wheeltrims. Sold with NEW MOT. Bargain at **ONLY £17,995 Retail** (Discount available for no part exchange)

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47 Full size high back coach seats with 3 point belt inertia reel belts, coach back end with luggage boot. Interior parcel racks with FAV and reading lights. New MOT. **Ideal Driver Training Vehicle** (i.e. 10m with ABS) Good condition. **ONLY £25,995 Retail**. (Discount available for no part exchange) or with 60 new (3+2seats) with 3 Point Belts at **£34,995 Retail**

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This coach is in absolutely immaculate condition! Resprayed white. Interior excellent, 49 recliners, courier, aircon, centre sunken toilet, twin screen video/stereo/PA, drinks, double glazing, Webasto. Sold with new MOT Engine Overhaul Just Undertaken by Mercedes Garage. **Only £63,995 Retail** (Discount available for no part exchange)

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THIS VEHICLE HAS HAD A COMPLETE INTERIOR RE-TRIM BY EASTGATE TO SEATS, RACKS, SIDE CASINGS, ROOF, ETC Aircon, Telma, 49 recliners, inertia belts, courier, centre sunken toilet, twin screen video/stereo/PA, drinks, double glazing, drivers bunk, tow bar. Sold with NEW MOT. **Only £59,995 Retail** (Discount available for no part exchange)

1996 SCANIA K1113 /VAN HOOL



File Photo
Comfort shift. Recently re-sprayed white, 49 recliners, courier, inertia belts, centre sunken toilet, video/stereo/PA, drinks, double glazing. Sold with NEW MOT. **Only £43,995 Retail**. (Discount available for no part exchange)

TO CLEAR



1990 Leyland Tiger 290/Plaxton Paramount 3500 (4*). Available as a 49 with toilet or as a 53 seater. (Retrimmed apx 4 years ago). Inertia Belts, Video, All over white, Telma, Webasto. NEW MOT. Bargain at **Only £6,995** (or **£7,995 converted to a 53**)

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Tourino

Available Shortly

34 Recliners + Driver, Air Con,
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Wheelchair up to 10
removable with 32 Highback
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Luggage Area Integral 63 Seats,
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Coach & Wheelchair Spec, High and
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Cummins L10/ZF, Northern Counties
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1993 K REG LEYLAND LYNX, 49 seats, Volvo engine, good tests.



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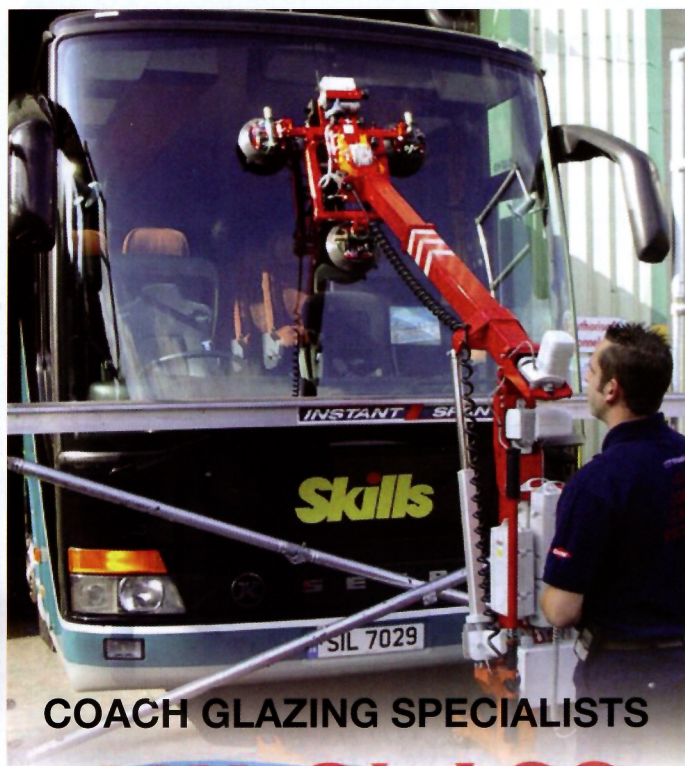
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Office Diary

From the editorial director's desk...

Monday: As mentioned last week. Start work at 7.00pm after interviewing Scania's Hasse Johansson in London (see pages 24-27). Quite a smooth deadline day actually. Still, too late to get home. Trudge over to the Premier Travel Inn by the office at 2.00am. Never quite sure what's so Premier about them. Pay for breakfast.

Tuesday: Regret paying for breakfast. Our Welsh correspondent Gareth Evans turns up for some work experience. Frighteningly enthusiastic. He can drive a bus and write and he's only 24! Train home. Takes hours.

Wednesday: An early start to get to seatbelt specialists Barry Hall in Lincoln. Give up at 10.00am. The A1 is jammed and I'm not going anywhere. Oh well must try another day...

Thursday: ... but not today. The Big Wind blows... and mostly blows over lorries in front of me. Read an 'interesting' article in a free magazine about how it was a lot better in the industry in the 'good old days' when there were 'characters'. Bit of a downer for all of us who couldn't be around then. Still I'm enjoying myself and the characters I meet seem to be too. Must set up a lunch/interview with people who actually currently work in the industry so we can talk about the present and the future.

Friday: Into the Fenns for lunch with an operator. After a year in Peterborough it's the first time I've ventured north east into the area. Have to say I was expecting a windswept hell of broken down farms and dykes. Sort of bad Belgium. Sorry! Gobsmailed by how English and stunning the villages are. A very civilized lunch with said (anonymous!) operator. Part of a group of operators who act as my sounding board for the magazine. News breaks that the game seems to be up for UK North. Not sure how to handle the story. Decide on a purely factual approach given that there seem to be some very aggrieved parties around.

Saturday: Write up the Hasse Johansson interview. Persuade other half to transcribe the tape. Very non-mathematical other half's eyes seem to glaze over as Mr Johansson gets into Eddy currents in motors. I guess this is more physics than she's ever heard in her life!



Too tall: Josephine Kime

Would you kick her off the bus?

Stunning model Josephine Kime was asked to get off the bus - for being too tall! The 23-year-old was shocked when she boarded a number 9 bus in London and the driver told her she would have to get

off, as at 5ft 11in tall, she would block his view in the mirror.

Josephine, from Chelsea, who also does TV work, said: "I thought he was joking, then he started to get impatient and angry. It's ridiculous."

London United was quick to defend itself in the national press, saying there are no height restrictions on its buses. Transport for London has apologised to the model, but has so far failed to track down the driver.

Missing bus parts

A 70-year-old bus driver was arrested in South Africa when it was found the bus he was driving was missing a couple of key components... namely the brakes and windscreen.

William Tswayi will appear before magistrates at the end of the month after police stopped his vehicle on route from Mozambique to Rustenburg, South Africa.

The bus was carrying around 100 passengers.

Meanwhile, 490 other buses and minibuses have been impounded in the region over the festive period - a number of which have had to pay fines of up to £107.

Organic bus in Cambridge

A passenger on Stagecoach's number 15 service near Cambridge had a surprise when he took his seat on the bus on Friday. Besides the usual discarded crisp packets left on the floor by other passengers, he also spotted a mushroom growing near the window.

Andy Campbell, Stagecoach Cambridgeshire's MD, said: "I'm amazed. I've never seen anything like it. There had been a repair to the upper saloon of the bus, it was not of the quality expected and there was water ingress.

"I'm not an expert on mushrooms but I understand these things can grow overnight. We will have the mushroom tested and we've taken the vehicle off the road."

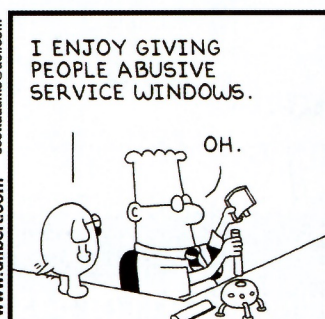
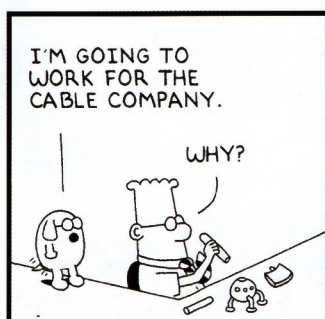
Mushroom expert, Dr Harry Hudson, a retired Cambridge University academic, studied the pictures of the unexpected fungi and declared: "The fungus in question is *Coprinus cinereus*, commonly called 'ink caps'. The fungus is common on compost heaps and rotting straw. It grows well on chipboard or plywood if it becomes moist or wet."

Googled...

<http://www.webs4u.co.nz/bsa/>

John Noakes, a Londoner, has been decorating local bus stops in New Zealand for many years since he moved there in the 70s. His collection of work can all be seen on this website, including albatross, dolphins, mountains, spacecraft and even coal mines. Not only do his paintings brighten up the usually dull concrete sheds, they also cover the typical collection of crude words that adorn bus stops in the region. John sadly passed away on January 5, but his work lives on in the city Dunedin and on this site.

Dilbert



Road Transport Industry Seminars 2007

“Drivers’ Hours”

Content Includes:

- **New Drivers’ Hours Rules:**
 - Definitions (and their implications)
 - Exemptions
 - Changes to rest periods and breaks
 - New rules on offences committed abroad
 - Operator liability
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**Half day seminar:
£85 inc. VAT per person
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The seminars are provided for the road transport industry and will be useful for anyone involved in the new drivers’ hours rules.

13:00 Lunch
14:00 Presentation
15:15 Tea and coffee

15:45 Question and Answers
16:45 Close

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